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IONE BY E. LYNN LINTON.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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# I O N E.

BY

E. LYNN LINTON,

AUTHOR OF

"PATRICIA KEMBALL," "THE ATONEMENT OF LEAM DUNDAS,"

"THE GIRL OF THE PERIOD," ETC.

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I N T W O V O L U M E S .

VOL. I.

L E I P Z I G

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1884.

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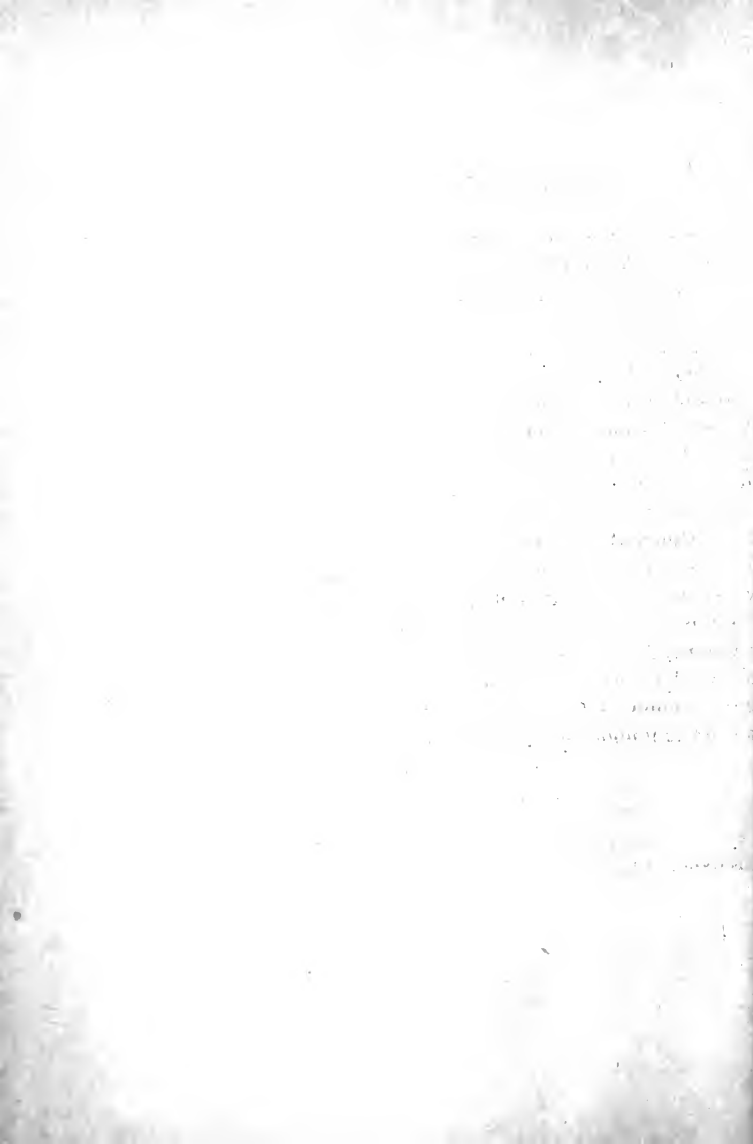
MY DEAR MR. SWINBURNE,

One of my earliest novels was dedicated to my beloved "Father," Walter Savage Landor. This, which must of necessity be among my latest, I dedicate to you, his faithful and loyal friend—as indeed you are the faithful and loyal friend of all to whom you have once given your trust and affection. I deeply feel the honour you do me in classing me among the number of those in whose sincerity you believe and whose friendship you return. Our original bond of union lies in the constant love and enduring thought we both have for our revered old Master; but we have others in our devotion to liberty, our belief in progress, our faith in humanity, and our want of fear. I am presumptuous in thus bracketing myself with you. You are one of the Captains of Thought, and I am only a humble foot soldier serving in the ranks. But just as captain and private follow the same banner and fight for the same good cause, so I dare to place myself by your side because of our common affection and our common aims. And you will forgive me that I thus link myself to immortality by coupling my name with yours.

Your sincere friend,

E. LYNN LINTON.

November 1883.



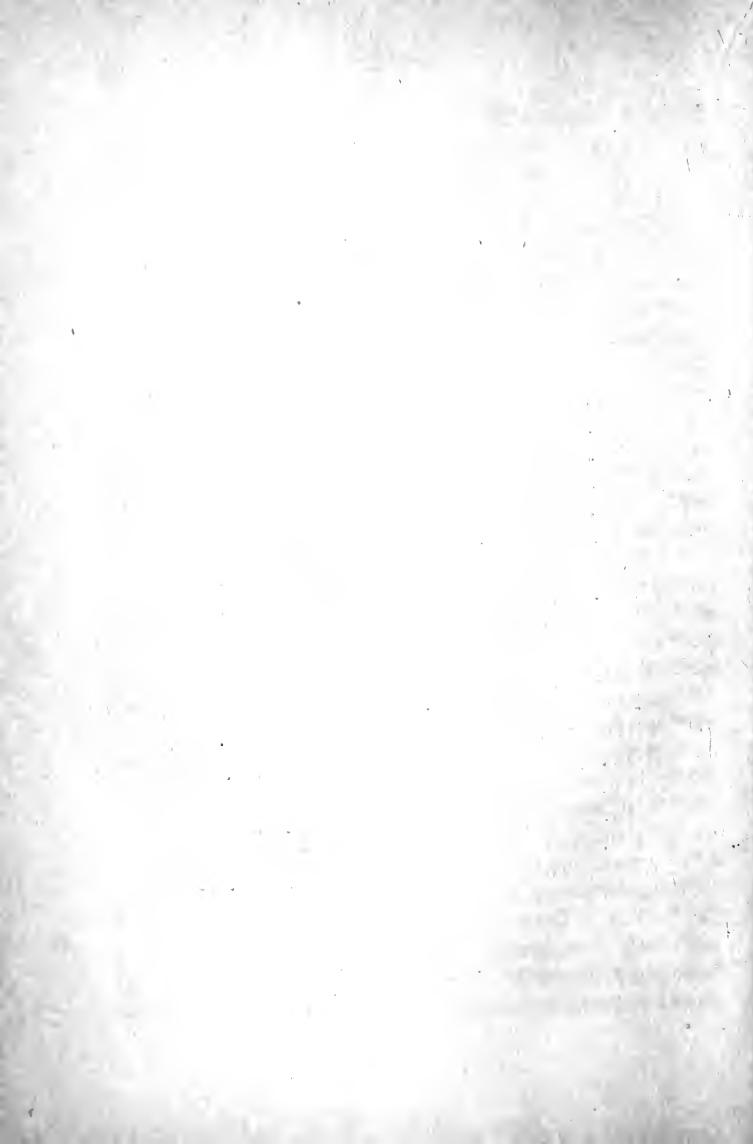
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# I O N E.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE NEW DOCTOR.

OAKHURST had only one fault to find with its new doctor:—he was too handsome. It was barely decent, as Miss Wintergreen said with that upward jerk of her head which went for so much. But Miss Maria Crosby simpered a little consciously, as one who knew, and said she did not quite agree with her dear Jane Wintergreen. And if she, a confirmed invalid and, in a manner, part owner of the local doctor, did not object to the young man's good looks, she was sure no one else need. Especially need not her dear Jane, who had never had a day's illness in her life, and who made it her boast that no medical man in England had ever been the richer by a pound of her money.

Miss Rachel Major, Maria's thirty-year-old niece and nurse, followed the lead of their friend Jane Wintergreen, and agreed with her that this new-comer, this Dr. St. Claire, was certainly too handsome for his work and the place. It was inconvenient; if no worse. It would have been better to have had some one more like that poor dear Dr. Brown who was dead and gone

—some good respectable father of a family without romance or a waist, and as destitute of elegance as a twopenny pipkin. But this young Dr. St. Claire—"Armine St. Claire; what a name for the parish doctor of a dull country town like this mopy old Oakhurst!" put in Rachel, parenthetically—was more like an artist, or a poet, or a disguised prince in a play, than a useful, hard-working apothecary:—which was all they wanted here. And she must say, for her own part, knowing what people were, she was sorry.

And when she said this she glanced with gentle malevolence at her aunt Maria, the invalid.

Maria pulled her lace ruffles well over her hands, smoothed the bright rose-coloured coverlet of her couch, and made a feint to put back her feathery ringlets with the tips of her taper fingers, in the elegant way for which she was famous.

"To hear you talk, Rachel, one would think that good looks were a crime!" she said with a shrill little laugh.

"They are often a snare, aunt Maria," said Rachel demurely.

"A snare I fancy most people would rather have than not, and only those despise who have not got," said aunt Maria as demurely.

"As none of us three can boast of good looks, we need not discuss that part of the business," said Jane Wintergreen sharply.

Jane stood as the embodiment of common-sense in Oakhurst; as the embodiment also of that kind of honesty which does not shrink from saying disagreeable things, and which has about as much tenderness of touch as a file or a saw. And she never lost an op-

portunity for giving her dear friend Maria a scrape when she could.

"Who said we were speaking of ourselves, Jane?" said Miss Maria with plaintive deprecation. "I am sure I am not! I know that I am a horrid fright now; but if I am, Rachel is no better, though she is a few years younger. People follow their childhood, and we go on as we have begun. And I may say this, that when I was a child I was as fair as a lily; for I have heard my poor mamma say so twenty times. I was quite a little angel, she used to say, and people would stop me in the streets to kiss me. But Rachel favoured her father, not us, and was always a little black thing—just like a little monkey. I remember when you could put her in a quart-pot, and she was the colour of a coffee-berry. And she has not changed since she grew up. She cannot wear light-blue or rose-pink for the life of her; and those are my colours now, as they have always been. I can wear nothing that becomes me half so well; but Rachel has to put up with purple and dark navy-blue, if she wants to be any way decent."

"Rachel is well enough," said Jane Wintergreen tartly. "If she has no complexion to speak of, she has a handsome nose and a good hand and foot; and I once heard our late rector say that a woman with a handsome nose and a good hand and foot had not far to go for a husband. And I am not so sure but that he meant Rachel Major; only his sister was in the way and would not have it."

"At all events, Rachel has not gone far enough for her husband, for all her hand and foot," said Miss Maria with a little laugh.

"I had a hand once, but I have spoiled it now. Rubbing for hours every day takes all the shape out of a hand," said Rachel with reproachful stoicism.

"Better spoil your hand, Rachel, by doing your duty, than harden your heart by leaving it undone," said aunt Maria.

"Don't I say so, aunt? and don't I do as I say?" retorted Rachel.

"Let me look at your hand, Rachel," said Jane Wintergreen. "Mercy me! how can you call it spoilt? I never saw such a girl as you are for running yourself down! You are very nice, I'm sure, if only you would think so."

"I have been brought up to run myself down, and to hear others run me down as well," said Rachel, beginning to cry. "Aunt Maria had a complexion and I had not; and neither she nor my poor mamma thought anything of me because I was small and dark. And as for my poor grandmamma, she used to declare that my poor papa must have been a Hottentot once on a time. And I could not help being ugly. No one would be ugly if they could help it," she added with undeniable reason and a fresh supply of tears.

"Now, Rachel, you have cried—and it all began about this young Dr. St. Claire," said Maria solemnly. "And it is a bad omen. I have seen it all my life—begin a thing with a cry and it ends with a cry. And you do not think of my poor nerves, and how all these scenes try me. No one ever does think of me and my nerves!" she added petulantly.

"Maria Crosby! how ever can you say such a thing?" cried Jane Wintergreen. "You, of all people, have no right to say that you are not considered.



Who is, if you are not? My word, what next! Rachel is just given up to you; and you are made more fuss with than enough! It is flat ingratitude to say you are not thought of; and so now! And you need not make yourself ill by crying. You want the truth spoken to you sometimes, Maria, as we all do; and you shall have it from me, I promise you!"

"You are very cruel to me—you always were, Jane," Maria exclaimed with hysterical excitement. "You are all jealous of me because I am a favourite in the place—that is just where it is. No, Rachel, you need not!—don't touch me!" she said angrily, while still sobbing, as her niece, having finished her own crying, went up to the couch penitent and wistful, according to her wont when her aunt "gave way" and "was upset." "You know in your heart that you wish me dead and gone, and then you would be free to do as you liked. You know it, and I know it too. Poor me! In ill-health, confined to my couch, and my own niece wishing me dead!—oh, dear me! oh, dear me! what will become of me?"

On which her hysterical tears culminated in hysterical screams, and it took a great deal of soothing and hot brandy and water, made strong and sweet, before she would consent to come round again. But Jane Wintergreen, who had suggested cold water thrown into her face, and her hands well slapped for counter-irritation, was angry with Rachel for administering a remedy which she began to suspect Maria was almost too ready to receive.

The invalid led her niece a hard life; and of all in Oakhurst and the neighbourhood, Rachel Major was the one most to be pitied. It was a restricted

and uninteresting kind of existence for every one; but hers was the most restricted and the most uninteresting. And as Rachel knew that the malady to which her youth and all its natural liberties and enjoyments were sacrificed was, the one part vanity and the other self-indulgence, she felt the slavery that resulted doubly hard to bear. No doctor could precisely make out Miss Maria Crosby's disease. Some said that it was the spine and some that it was the heart; one specialist fell foul of the mucous membrane and the other made his camel of the sympathetic nerve. But all left her as they found her—lying on her invalid couch, kept up by beef-tea, strong jellies and much brandy; and unable, so she said, to put her feet to the ground. Had she tried, she would have found that she had as serviceable muscles as the rest, and that she might have been as well as she would. Wisely for herself, looking at things from her point of view, she decided that she would not. She knew her distinction to lie in her invalid couch, her dainty work, her pretty flowers, her cages full of birds, her pensive smile, her waxen skin, her low, sweet, studied voice, and the saintly patience with which she bore her mysterious malady. If she were to get up and go about like other people, what would she be? Just an old maid with a limited income and no claims to consideration—a faded beauty whose star had set—one of the herd of feminine failures—no more. Now she was a personage—the invalid par excellence of the little town—a creature exempt from duty and entitled to privileges—a kind of votive shrine, where those who ministered by way of flowers, sweet cakes, and frequent visits to “that poor Maria Crosby,” deserved

well of Heaven, and brought peace to their own consciences.

Wherefore she held by her rôle, and for the last ten years had been the soft-spoken and delicately-cared-for Moloch who had passed her young niece Rachel through the fire as her victim; who had also made her medical attendant the object of her adoration—not always discreetly tendered. So that Rachel was justified, if, seeing what had been said and done in the very dry tree of old Dr. Brown and his like, she feared an increase of folly in the green and flowery growth of the young and handsome Armine St. Claire.

Others besides Jane Wintergreen and Rachel Major thought the new-comer both too young and too handsome for the place. Mrs. Barrington—old Mrs. Barrington as she was called—who lived with her daughter Monica in the Dower House, about a mile out of Oakhurst, she too said it was a pity that Dr. Brown's successor should be so young and good-looking, and that she should feel quite uncomfortable if she had to speak to him, and scarcely confident of his skill. Though, what a man's professional skill has to do with a pair of large soft eyes, a mass of blue-black curling hair, a skin as white as ivory and as smooth as silk, a dainty little moustache, and hands and feet no larger than a woman's, it would be difficult to say. Still, beauty and brains are not generally supposed to go together; and the prejudice, though unjust, is popular.

Monica, who seldom thought at cross-corners with her mother, quite agreed with her on this; and said, in her soft, sweet way: Yes, it was a great pity that

the new man was so young, and she hoped indeed, they should not want him at the Dower House. It would be too embarrassing to have to speak to him.

As for Anthony Barrington, the son and brother who lived at the Manor, he, as autocrat of the Oakhurst world, almost took it on himself to shoulder the law as his own private club, and turn the new doctor "*vi et armis*" out of the place. But his wife put up her airy buckler and protected the handsome St. Claire, as she had protected some others before now. She ruled her husband as pretty women with nice little ways, lively manners, a sharp kind of wit, and neither heart nor conscience to speak of, often do rule men whose gravity trenches on moroseness, and whose pride is only equalled by their spirit of domination. She ruled him without showing the shadow of her sceptre, and while leaving him the belief that he was absolute and supreme. She ruled him in the way best expressed by "twisting him round her little finger"—that is, by making him soft by her caresses and pliant by her playfulness, then clinching all at the right moment by pretty alluring little pouts, mingled with the frank impertinence and amusing wilfulness of a vivacious and rather self-willed child.

"You dear old thing!" she said with a laugh, lifting up her arched eyebrows with as much fun as astonishment when Anthony had thundered against the new-comer. "What can it signify to any one whether a doctor is a fright or an Adonis? You might as well find fault with a good-looking grave-digger. They are brothers, you know."

"Theo! what an absurd child you are!" said Anthony, pretending displeasure and inwardly diverted.

"Well, so they are," said Theo quite seriously. "And you might as well say that the poor dear ghosts should have a nice grave respectable old sexton to potter about them, as that a doctor ought to be old and ugly. What can it signify? Who cares for a doctor?" with a contemptuous little accent and a saucy toss of her small head.

"Doctors are men," said Anthony rather slowly.

"Oh no, they are not!" said Theodosia; "they are prescriptions. Men! my goodness, no! they are only medicine spoons! And I am sure it does not signify whether one's medicine spoon is pretty to look at or hideous. It is horrid, whichever it is."

"Well, perhaps you are right, Theo," said Anthony.

"Perhaps? I am!" was her reply. "And if I were you, Anthony, I would not pay this new man, this Dr. St. Claire, such a compliment as to object to him because he is young and handsome. After all, he is not so very good-looking—not like my handsome old Bear! And even if he were, what on earth would it signify?"

"Nothing," said Anthony.

And from this moment the Master of the Manor changed front and agreed with Theodosia that it was foolish for people to make such a fuss about the young man's good looks. He was only a doctor as she said, and what could it possibly signify to any human being if a mere doctor were handsome or the reverse? Besides, it was only English to let him have a fair trial, and to take the trouble of opposing him was both to pay him too great a compliment and to do themselves injustice.

What Anthony Barrington passed, his friend and

territorial neighbour, Edward Formby of Hillside, was sure to back; throwing such weight as came from his broad acres and the unrooted possibilities of his bachelorhood into the same scale as that in which Anthony had thrown his broad acres and the settled influence of his married state. Hence, young Dr. St. Claire was allowed to settle peaceably at Oakhurst, and to show of what stuff he was made, unhindered by malevolence or opposition; and the unfriendly stir which had been made in the waters on his first appearance, after a time ran itself clear, depositing its ugly sediment by the way.

He proved to be made of very fair stuff indeed. Even Anthony himself, Brahmin of the Brahmins as he was, even he was forced to admit that the young man knew how to behave and was not such a puppy as he looked. He said this one day at the Town Hall, where the local magistracy assembled on Saturdays to apportion justice to the evil doers, though they sometimes forgot to award equity to the oppressed. And he said it with Anthony Barrington's well-known manner of patronage, which was vastly more offensive than his disfavour. It was a manner which asserted his own superiority by the contemptuous kind of generosity with which he spoke of his inferiors. It was tossing a few crumbs to deserving dogs while keeping the loaf as his own rightful share.

Edward Formby, both more good-natured and less careful of local proprieties than his friend, went a step beyond, and translated Anthony's comparative permission into positive acceptance; and, thus marshalled, the rank and file pressed forward altogether. Jane Wintergreen was the only one who stood out against

the general verdict; but then Jane Wintergreen was notorious for narrowness and bitterness, so that her prejudices were harmless because they were universal.

All the women, save herself and perhaps Rachel Major, were confessedly on the handsome young doctor's side. He was the kind of man whom women love and of whom men are contemptuous and jealous in one:—"The kind of thing that fools admire," said Jane Wintergreen with a jerk.

To which Anthony Barrington replied coldly, lifting his thin lips on one side and showing his long eye-tooth: "Think so? I pity their tastes!"

Dr. St. Claire was young, slight, a little delicate in health, and very affectionate in temper. He adored women, loved children, and delighted in dogs—but he liked the smaller kind better than the bigger. He was full of graceful accomplishments and small helpful capacities; naturally handy; evidently domestic; extremely obliging. He was ready to do anything that he was asked and he could do everything that was required. He could tune a piano; humour a sewing-machine; make boats und fans and caps and puzzles for the children out of old newspapers; play chess with refined ladies who prided themselves on their gambits, and whist with short-tempered men inexorable as to the call, and the need of getting out trumps with a long suit to bring in. He was a capital tennis-player and a patient listener to dull stories; he had a pure tender voice, and he sang pretty little French romances to perfection. Of this last accomplishment, however, he was exceedingly chary. As he was in deep mourning, it was perhaps natural that he should not do much in the way of light little songs;

and his disinclination to sing these graceful trifles, of which the whole value lies in the method, to people who understood neither their art nor their meaning, passed as respect for his unknown but manifestly heavy loss.

Charming all through, his manners were perhaps his strongest point. Though not a flatterer, he was more courteous, more attentive in minor matters, more graceful in speech and more quick to understand half-tones, than is the average Englishman; and he had a way of idealising characters which left a very rounded and statuesque impression on the mind. He acted on the theory, which with him was a principle, that every woman thinks herself misunderstood, and that if you wish to please the sex all round, you must throw your plummet into unfathomed depths and stock all ponds with gold and silver fish. It was both the safest and the pleasantest plan, and kept him in the sunshine on high levels, out of the way of whirlwinds and waterspouts.

His suspected delicacy of health, his isolation and his sweet ways, appealed to the maternal instinct of Oakhurst with wonderful strength. Even young girls felt that he was something precious to whom it would be lovely to minister; while middle-aged women, both married and single, professed to feel for him as for a son; and the popular feminine phrase with which discussions were for the most part ended was: "And he is so pure!"

Certainly he was notably circumspect in his conduct, so that he was trusted as if he had been an older man—and perhaps with more reason.

For all this, he was out of place as a country



doctor, making his living by such a practice as that of Oakhurst. He looked as if he had been born for courts rather than to go across moors on windy winter nights to see some old farmer who had made himself ill by a prolonged drinking-bout—as if it were his right to spend the balmy summer evenings in some jasmine-covered bower at the feet of fair patricians graciously accepting his homage, rather than by the bedside of some silly milliner who had lowered her system by tight-lacing and inordinate tea. Still, here he was and here he must remain—failing that problematical turn in the wheel which should give him an income without a capital, or a lucrative post in the official world without apprenticeship or patronage.

He had now been a year at Oakhurst, and, all things considered, his flag flew under a shining sky and his sails were set to a fair wind. The Anthony Barringtons had asked him to the Manor when they had had one of their second-set duty dinners; and old Mrs. Barrington had invited him to afternoon tea with the curate, the local lawyer, and the Oakhurst organist. Edward Formby had had him at a really well-conditioned luncheon, where the other men invited had certainly stared when the new guest was announced, but where he had held his own with so much tact and judgment as to sink his profession and float his personality before the meal was half over; and all the smaller people—especially those with marriageable daughters—had vied one with the other which should show him most favour. He had been married by common report to every girl in the place; and every girl in the place had wished that common report were true. But he

had never hinted what could be construed into preference, not to speak of love, and he seemed to have an almost supernatural "flair" for man-traps. He did his duty and attended to all alike with professional punctuality and personal impartiality; and he was not to blame if each young lady thought those handsome eyes of his meant more than he said, or that his fingers, when he felt her pulse, pressed her wrist with peculiar emphasis. In each case the wish was father to the thought, and the child was none of his.

It was odd, how often the girlhood of Oakhurst was ailing at this time. Hitherto, the place had been considered remarkably healthy; but now the elders were in better case than they had been in comfortable, gossipy, old Dr. Brown's time, while most of the girls, who then never had a day's ill-health, had now fallen into mysterious maladies which demanded a great deal of medical attendance. Many seemed threatened with consumption; a few had spells of low fever; all lost their gaiety, their appetite, their sleep; so that young Dr. St. Claire was fully occupied and somewhat exercised in his mind as to cause and treatment.

He had rather a difficult part to play; for more than one of the parents in the "second-set" resented his indifference, and thought he might do worse than ally himself to some respectable family who would help to make his standing sure, and who would give him the home he wanted. There was Flora Farley, the daughter of Captain Farley, now owner and once captain of a small vessel trading between Whitehaven and Hull—why would not she do? The eldest of six, and such a notable body as she was, she would save him more by her management than she would cost

him for her keep. Or there was Madge Langhorne, the lawyer's daughter, and the youngest of nine—she was a real sunbeam in the house, and would make him such a pleasant companion in the winter evenings when his work was done and he came home to his own fireside! Or there was Rose Chesson, the one ewe lamb with no sister to divide nor interfere. Rose Chesson was the very thing. Her father, the retired cheese-monger, might be a trifle rough, and the mother was a little too fond of scarlet and gold, but Rose had had a good education, and with her piano and her pencil and her nice little sum in the Three per Cents, she might find a welcome to any man's home and heart. And what the deuce did the young fellow want that he should not be satisfied with what he could have? Were none of them good enough for him? Was he looking after Miss Barrington herself? or perhaps the Duke's daughter was not beyond him?

His persistent celibacy and cautious avoidance of all these patent man-traps, went near to injure the young doctor's popularity and curtail his fees in more households than one. But he held on his way, never heeding the broad hints here nor the cold shoulders there—a male Diana without ever a female Endymion in the unsuspected shadows of an undiscovered Latmos; and the maidenhood of Oakhurst got pale, had mysterious ailments, and took unpleasant draughts with secret weeping in vain.

One day young Mrs. Barrington took it on herself to touch openly the question which all were handling in secret. She was one of those irrepressible little women who put their busy white fingers into all the pies within range; and as there is a great deal of in-

dolence, some cowardice and more good-nature in the world, she was allowed to stir to the depths what others were not suffered even to skim.

"Dr. St. Claire, you ought to marry," she said suddenly, à propos of nothing. "It is so much nicer when one's medical man is married."

"I cannot afford to marry on Oakhurst practice," answered Armine, lightly. "I must wait until I am a fashionable physician in London."

"There are many nice girls here who would make excellent wives; and the neighbourhood would like it better," she returned, in that half-impertinent way of a great person talking to a little one, ignoring all answers, reasonings, disclaimers, and pressing the original point as if nothing had been said to contravene it.

He lifted his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders in his pretty un-English way.

"Mr. Barrington says so," she persisted. "He says that all medical men ought to marry. I do not know why, but that is what he says. He says that it is very much against you that you are a single man."

St. Claire raised his eyes full into hers. What beautiful eyes they were!—far too beautiful for a man; too soft and darkly blue; with lashes too long and curling; with an expression too loving and pleading.

"I should be very glad to take your advice, Mrs. Barrington. I wish from my heart that I could!" he said emphatically. "But what can a man do when the stars in their courses fight against him?"

He spoke with emphasis for the first part, with a certain subdued pathos for the second.

"I do not believe that the stars ever do fight in their courses against us. How can they?" answered

Theodosia, with that queer literalness which those who liked her called naïve and quaint, and those who did not, silly and affected. "I believe in a man's doing what he chooses to do."

"Do you believe that he can overcome all obstacles by the simple power of his will? that in truth '*Vouloir c'est pouvoir*'?" asked Armine with a sad little smile.

"Some things are impossible, of course," she answered as if arguing the question on its merits. "We cannot fly up to the moon for instance; though Jules Verne says we can. But we can do a great deal when we like."

"Just so," he said, that sad little smile still about his lips. "But when we want the moon, you see, we have to submit to necessity and go without."

"But it is so silly to want the moon!" said Theodosia, gravely. "Only babies do that. And I do not think you can call Miss Rose Chesson, or Miss Flora Farley, or Miss Madge Langhorne, or any other young lady in Oakhurst, the moon or stars either!" she added with a little laugh.

A flush came into his face, and his eyes gleamed with something that was not quite pleasure, as he seemed to straighten his back and lift his head with involuntary pride.

"I did not know that I was speaking of any of these young ladies—for whom, however, I have the greatest respect," he said coldly.

"Oh! if you have some secret adoration, some grande passion in the past, I have no more to say," she cried, looking at him with an arch smile.

"No! nor did I say this," he answered, returning her smile with one as full of meaning, if not so arch.

As full of meaning—yes; but what did that smile mean? He looked right into her eyes as he spoke; right into her very soul, as it seemed to her. What did he want her to understand? What did he seek to discover?

“Then it must be the moon?” she said with a shrill little laugh, patently artificial.

“Perhaps it is,” he replied. “If it is, I must, as you say, content myself with disappointment, and go without.”

Here the conversation dropped. But that sad sweet smile, and the way in which Dr. St. Claire had raised his beautiful eyes to hers, haunted young Mrs. Barrington for days after. Could he have meant her? It seemed madness to suppose it: but could he? Was she the moon unattainable for all his longing? was her previous marriage with Anthony the stars which had fought in their courses against him? She hoped not! Men are such unmanageable creatures at the best; but men who are not real gentlemen are worse than all! They are awful; and think nothing of making a scandal if the whim takes them. Indeed, they are rather proud, than not, to compromise those who are superior to them in station; and of course Dr. St. Claire was immeasurably her inferior; and it would be such a wicked thing if he were to think of her other than as a saint, a spirit, a fairy, a queen. It would be so foolish and so dangerous! She sincerely hoped not, she said to herself a dozen times a day; for if Anthony found it out, he would forbid St. Claire the house, and then Mamma—Anthony’s mother—would blame her when she did not deserve it. For she was sure she had done nothing to encourage him

—nothing! No, she would not think of it; it was so very wrong, so silly, and so useless. It was, indeed, like crying for the moon! And what folly that is!

Nevertheless, ever from that day, Theodosia Barrington, Anthony's pretty little feather-headed wife, cherished a certain secret kindness for Dr. Armine St. Claire which made her speak of him with interest, and often say, with a tender kind of compassion: "Poor young man! After all, he is to be pitied!"

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## CHAPTER II.

## AT THE DOWER HOUSE.

"POOR young man! After all, he is to be pitied!"

They were discussing the young doctor at the Dower House. They often discussed him, both here and elsewhere. Beside his good looks and good manners, and the wonderful cures which were every now and then reported of him, there was an element of the unknown in his history which made him interesting and dramatic. He was not like one of themselves, born and bred in the place, of whom nothing unexpected could be discovered and by whom nothing unusual could be done. For all his year's sojourn and good conduct, Dr. St. Claire was still essentially a "dark" member of the community; and though no one knew anything to his disadvantage, no one could swear there was nothing to know, or stake so much as a fraction of credit on the assurance that the young man's moral bill of health was clean all through. A tragedy in the past was by no means improbable; and English county families of assured respectability, whose social ledgers written on virgin parchment are public property to be read by all, regard a tragedy in a man's history as cousin-german to a crime. A maniacal father, a murdered mother, even a brother hanged in war-time by mistake for a spy—such things as these throw a certain blight over the family-tree which



touches the little twigs as well as the parent bole. And who could be quite sure that some such fatal blemish did not mar the perfect respectability of the St. Claire records? It was a possibility and a doubt; and the young doctor had the benefit, crosswise delivered.

Moved by this element of the unknown, Theodosia Barrington had always been fond of talking of him. She was fond of talking on all subjects, having that facility of speech which is like nothing so much as the incessant trickle of a leaking spout. And of late, having in remembrance those stars in their courses which had fought against his peace, and the yearning look in his eyes that had emphasized his sad little smile—believing that the handsome young doctor suffered from a secret wound of which she was the cause and of which she alone knew the existence—she spoke of him more than ever, and always with a curious undertone of tenderness breaking through her words, as if she had gathered him under the edges of her lace lappet for shelter and protection. So now, when sitting with her sister and mother-in-law, she said with a half-conscious little smile:

“Poor young man! After all, he is to be pitied!”

“Why is he to be pitied?” asked Monica.

She was bending over her wood-work, but she straightened herself in her chair, and raised her soft, grey, dreamy eyes with frank astonishment in their look as she said again: “Why, Theo?”

“He is so much better than his station—so much beyond his natural associates,” said Theodosia rather primly.

“Yes, indeed,” chimed in Mrs. Barrington, for one

of the rare times in her life agreeing with her daughter-in-law. "He might almost be a real gentleman for manners and appearance. It is a pity that he should look so much like a man of family and fortune and so little like what he is. He is nothing now—neither a gentleman nor a merely professional man. It is really a great pity!"

"Is he not a gentleman, mother?" asked Monica.

She was once more bending over her wood-work; and this time she neither straightened herself nor looked up.

"Not what we mean by the word, my dear," answered Mrs. Barrington, with the calm simplicity of confessed superiority. "Not a gentleman like your brother or Edward Formby."

Theodosia gave a short laugh.

"Well, no, not exactly!" she said, with a proud little toss of her small smooth head. Immediately after, she softened. "Still, he is to be pitied," she said in a compassionate voice; and this time Monica did not ask Why?

But Mrs. Barrington, looking at her daughter-in-law—"Anthony's wife," as she generally called her—said in deprecation:

"I do not see why, Theodosia. On the contrary, I think he has got on here exceedingly well, and has done far better than might have been expected. Very few young men would have done so well, coming as he did without letters of introduction or personal patronage of any kind—as if he had dropped from the clouds. Why do you say he is to be pitied, my dear? You know that I disapprove of all false sentiment; and surely this is a very false sentiment indeed!"

"We do not know all his private life; and he often looks very sad," said Theodosia in the same prim way as before. It was a way she had when she wanted to exasperate her husband's mother.

Again Monica looked up, with the same astonishment in her eyes as before, but she did not speak.

"You seem to have studied him very closely, my dear," said Mrs. Barrington, with slight but evident displeasure.

"I am fond of watching people," returned Theodosia carelessly; "and I have watched Dr. St. Claire sometimes. And I always fancy that he has had some great sorrow in his life. In fact, I am sure of it!"

"My dear!" remonstrated Mrs. Barrington, always slightly but certainly displeased.

"What kind of sorrow?" asked Monica, changing her tool.

"Perhaps he has loved above himself—loved hopelessly," returned Theodosia, with a half-breathed and wholly compassionate sigh.

"My dear Theodosia, what extraordinary ideas you have!" again remonstrated Mrs. Barrington, this time almost angrily; certainly with a briskness of disfavour rare from her to all the world save Anthony's wife, but by no means rare to her. "I should hope that Dr. St. Claire is far too well principled a young man to permit himself such a folly. What very remarkable fancies you have, my dear child! It is a pity you encourage them as you do."

"One cannot help one's thoughts, mamma," said Theodosia sharply. "I always thought one's mind at least was free! And I do not see the good of brains at all if one may not use them."

"Use them, yes; but in a proper manner," returned Mrs. Barrington.

"Is thinking that a young man may have had an unfortunate love-affair, because he looks unhappy, such an improper manner?" said Theodosia pertly. "I think it very natural!"

"And I, on the contrary, think it a little indelicate in a young woman like you to indulge in such ideas at all," said Mrs. Barrington coldly.

She was naturally a sweet-tempered and patient kind of woman, but nothing tried her so much as this want of solidity, this flightiness of Anthony's wife, who was always pursuing some phantom or running away from some shadow. Now she was crazed with the dread of infection, when she insisted on the purification of the whole neighbourhood by such floods of carbolic acid that an Oakhurstian might be known half a mile off. Now she could not sleep at night for fear of burglars, when every door and window at the Manor had to be fitted up with pistols and alarm-bells, while savage dogs roamed loose about the premises at night, and frightened the labourers and house-servants nearly out of their senses in the morning. Now she took up the cause of the Continental poor, and advocated Communistic doctrines and peasant proprietorship for every county but her own; and now she violently patronized some local duck, who, she was determined, should prove a swan in the ugly stage, presently to manifest his inherited royalty by some grand flight heavenwards—which was like insisting that a fire-balloon was a star. Now it was art and now it was charity. "Mind" was once her favourite hobby, and reading societies, essay societies, pen and

pencil societies were its trappings; and then she grew tired of intellect and went into the most prosaic actuality—to learning how to cook potatoes and scour saucepans, how to clean grates and how to trim lamps. But nothing lasted long; so that she was really as fatiguing to consecutive people as if she had been a Will-o'-the-wisp dancing before them. And especially was she fatiguing to old Mrs. Barrington, who could not bear much mental unrest, and whose brain had long ceased to receive new impressions and to travel along untrodden paths of thought. If she had had children, thought her mother-in-law, she would have been far wiser and steadier than she was now; and it was a thousand pities that she had had none. But though Mrs. Barrington said euphemistically that it was unfortunate, in her heart she held it as blameable; and her regret that Theodosia had not done her duty to the family and the estate by giving Anthony an heir, was undeniably as much resentment as sorrow. She thought her daughter-in-law as lightminded and unpractical here as in other things; and her childlessness was less a misfortune than a fault. Mrs. Barrington was not the only good woman who has fallen foul of nature as if it were a crime.

"Indelicate, mamma!" retorted Theodosia. "If it is indelicate to fall in love, what was I when I married your son? and what were you and my own mother? How can it be indelicate when everybody does it?"

"See how well I am getting on with my frame, Theo," said Monica in the sudden way of a person who, absorbed in her own pursuit, has heard nothing of the conversation eddying round her. "I have almost finished it now. Is it not pretty?"

"No," said Theodosia shortly. "The acorns are too big and the leaves are too stiff."

"Are they?" said Monica, holding the frame at a little distance and looking as if she thought her sister's criticism serious and worth consideration.

With no pretension to beauty nor genius in any supreme degree, Monica was a girl whom half the world called sweet and the other half clever. She had never been known to say an unkind thing nor to do a foolish one, and she was always ready to give help of a gentle and feminine kind to those who needed it. But she was not one of the active members of society, and she waited to be sought rather than went forward to seek. Since her father's death and their removal to the Dower House, two years ago, she and her mother had lived very retired lives, mainly devoted to graceful little industries, local charities, and each other. They let the busy world rush by them unheeded, and shared in none of its follies and but few of its pleasures. People said it was a pity that poor Miss Barrington did not go out more; and their compassion was genuine. To judge by appearances, however, it was a waste of force; for Monica seemed to be entirely content with life as she found it made for her by duty and her mother's will. And human nature having the beneficent power of falling into habits which satisfy by repetition, as well as revolting against those which pall by monotony, she had fallen into the habit of quiet domesticity and daughterly devotion, and wanted no more than what she had.

There was a curiously still and gentle atmosphere about these ladies—a kind of moral perfume which reminded one of the faint sweet scent of dried rose-

leaves. They had a subtle charm of which no one could precisely define the cause, yet of which all were conscious. It was not only in Mrs. Barrington's pale, pure, passionless face, which had once been beautiful and was still lovely in its own sad gentle way; not only in her smooth white hair, like a silver line beneath her widow's cap; nor in her gentle smile; nor yet in that air of sympathy matched with purity which made so many tell her their sorrows, but none their sins. It was not only in Monica's soft grey eyes full of that thought which is not born of observation; of those dreams which are unspoken desires; of those aspirations which are impossible as hopes and not sufficiently substantial to be regrets—those dreams, those aspirations that belong to women whose experience is limited and who imagine what they have neither seen nor felt—not even in the soft and melodious voice which each had alike, nor in the gentle courtesies which also each had alike. It was not only in their patent purity which libertines would have respected and saints would have honoured. It was not in one thing nor yet in another, but in all—like that perfume of dried rose-leaves mixed with aromatic herbs and odoriferous gums which diffused itself over the whole house—faint, delicate, subtle and uncatalogued, but interpenetrating and characteristic. Some called them ladylike, not knowing how else to qualify them; and some called them old-fashioned, where the epithet was for praise not reproach; some said they were “so good,” which was a wide sweep, and some “so quiet,” which was a narrow range; but all agreed that no fault could be found with them, save such as was contained in that regretful protest from the lively and energetic: “It

was a pity poor Miss Barrington did not go out more, and that her mother held her so close."

Perhaps, too, there was the faintest echo of dissatisfaction in the question which for the last three years people had been asking of each other: "When was Miss Barrington going to marry?" She was twenty-three now, and at twenty-three a girl ought to be thinking of getting settled if she is to settle at all. It is not good to marry too early, according to English notions; but it was not wise to wait too long; and Monica had waited quite long enough.

She ought to make up her mind and take Mr. Edward Formby of Hillside. He was the husband manifestly designed for her by Providence. Age, station, rent-roll, the lay of the land and her brother Anthony's desire, were all in his favour and they should influence her decision. The alliance had been arranged by the public, speaking as one man, ever since the birth of the little lady at the Manor had followed by seven years that of the heir of Hillside. But at twenty-three and thirty respectively, the two were still uncoupled; and people could not make out whose fault it was, nor why. Anthony, who was twelve years older than his sister, had been married for the last nine; but, as has been said, his wife was childless, which made it all the more incumbent on Monica to continue the family and frustrate the hopes of a certain Major James Barrington of the Artillery, an obnoxious cousin now out in India with his battery. Being the heir, the Major was naturally looked on as a robber and an enemy; and, though a fine fellow enough to his family and friends, his future occupancy of the estates was regarded as one of the direst misfortunes



that could befall Oakhurst, the Manor, or the Barringtons. Far better one of their immediate own, though only on the spindle side—far better a Formby-Barrington than an uncle's son born on the outside of the groove and brought up with a different shibboleth! But, in spite of all his strong lateral pressure, the thing had not come off as it should have done, and speculation exhausted itself in vain.

It must be confessed that Edward Formby, though by no means a cold man, was not a very ardent wooer. He liked Monica Barrington far away the best of all the girls he knew; and whenever he said, as he sometimes did, that he wished he had had a sister, he thought of her. But when he pictured the women for whom the world had gone mad—the Helens, the Aspasia's, the Cleopatras of men's love—he did not give them a line nor a hue from her. He knew that he was designed by Providence and the fitness of things to take her to Hillside as his wife; but his state was one of philosophic waiting on the clearing of events and the ordering of days, rather than of active desire or eager endeavour; and, provided he married in reasonable time to have heirs so as to secure the family succession, he was contented to abide in patience, neither consumed with desire nor tormented by the delay.

So there the two stood, looking at each other across that narrow strip of silence which a hint from her or a word from him would have bridged over; while Anthony wondered and fumed at this long adjournment and Oakhurst speculated and antedated at its pleasure.

Pending the final arrangement of things, Edward

Formby often went to London; perfected himself in billiards and in whist; bred a few horses for the turf, and ran as straight as he rode; drove a spanking team of chestnuts and the neatest drag in the country; was devoted to polo, pigeon-shooting, and pure breeds all round; was a keen sportsman and a lenient magistrate, as well as the most generous of all the guardians on the Board; was acknowledged to be a good judge of jockeys but a bad one of men; had a refined taste in wine and a catholic one in women; was a man of his hands in all ways, and the best-tempered and kindest-hearted gentleman in the district. Such as he was, with the figure of an athlete and the face of a faun, with his clever hands and his unstored head, his faults and his virtues, his worldly possessions and his mental lack, he managed to exist and be glad in his own way, waiting for the dawn of that undesignated day when he should take Monica Barrington to Hillside as its mistress, and then and there sow with a sigh the last of those wild oats which men find it so pleasant to plant.

This, then, was how matters stood with respect to Monica and her marriage. Not formally betrothed, she was yet in a certain sense engaged; and not even for the Duke himself would her brother have allowed her to fling over Edward Formby, nor would her mother have consented to any other alliance. And though English girls are free to marry where they list when once the magic age of twenty-one has been reached, yet legal freedom does not always tear asunder domestic bonds, and parents and elder brothers have quite as much power as the Master of the Rolls or the Lord Chancellor. With Monica Barrington disobedience to

her natural heads would have been as impossible as political rebellion to the Princess Beatrice.

Her mother was her life, the object of her deepest devotion, her daily care, her hourly thought and love. Anthony was in the place of her father—the appointed ruler of her destinies as head of the House whereof she was but a minor member. Between them both she had neither the wish for nor the possibility of freedom; and she did not regret what she did not desire. She made her own private world of dreams. For her outward life she ministered to her mother; for her inward, she lived in an ideal land where she wrote poetry and conquered the world's praise like Corinne—where she was now a heroine and now a saint—where she loved and was beloved by some beautiful being who had nothing of earth but its material restrictions—who was a man in form and a spirit in substance. Music and poetry, painting and lofty thought would be the speech of their love and the bond of their union. They would live where the sun ever shone, and the earth was ever green; where the starry night was as the silver lining to the golden robe of day; where the sun did not scorch nor the north-wind chill; and where, to sit hand in hand among the flowers, would be the consummation of their bliss.

This habit of dreaming made Monica in some sense indifferent to the facts of her daily life, always excepting her care for her mother. She created her own happiness, and reigned as queen in her own domain. No one could take her treasures from her. No one could destroy her gods, nor desolate her shrines, nor desecrate her holy places. She admitted

no one into her confidence; and not even her mother guessed at the form of that veiled Isis to whom those long spells of silence were consecrated. When the snow fell and the bitter east-wind blew, Monica was safe in that island of Atalantis, where the blue sea lapped the shining sand, and the south breeze brought the scents of flowers and the far-off songs of birds. When all Oakhurst was convulsed over some petty dispute in the vestry, some misunderstanding at the Board of Guardians and the like, Mrs. Barrington's daughter was mentally writing poetry that should stir the world, painting pictures that should elevate the race, making music that should realise the fable of Amphion and the might of Orpheus. What had she to do with the sordid world of prosaic fact, or what had it to do with her? Isolated on her pure heights she lived above and beyond her surroundings, and possessed her soul in peace. But her ideal life was rendering her unfit for practical existence; and she was running into dangers of which she knew neither the name nor the extent.

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## CHAPTER III.

## OVER THE WOOD-WORK.

WHILE Theodosia was appearing to criticise Monica's work with judgment, and Monica was appearing to think her words worthy of attention, the young doctor was seen driving up the sweep before rounding the angle to halt at the hall-door.

"Why, here *is* Dr. St. Claire!" said young Mrs. Barrington with more than usual animation. "Why has he come, mamma? Is anyone ill?"

"Grace has a cough and a pain in her side," was the elder lady's reply. "I must see him before he goes, Monica," she added, turning to her daughter. "Ring the bell, my dear. They must not let him go before I see him."

"I hope Grace is not really ill—she is such a good servant," said Theodosia with unwonted amiability.

"I did not think you had ever noticed her," returned Mrs. Barrington with a gratified smile.

The arrogance of her manner to servants, and the indifference of Anthony's wife to all the humane side of mistresshood, had always pained her mother-in-law; and Mrs. Barrington was glad to see what she took to be the sign of better things. To her, servants were beings of a lower race, destined by Divine wisdom to subordination and ignorance, incapable of right judgment or true morality unless led, or if need be coerced,

by their betters—but coerced with as much gentleness as strictness—dominated for their own good, and the glory of God in the setting forth of discipline. Simple in her own tastes, she looked on fashionable array in her female servants as both indecorous and sinful; and the man who should have smoked a cigar when in her service would have been warned for the first offence and discharged for the second. She liked best those maids who could neither read nor write, and those men who abjured newspapers and knew nothing of politics. She translated the famous division of “men, women, and the Harveys,” into “men, women, and domestic servants;” but if they were ill she had them carefully nursed; if they were in sorrow she comforted them by telling them how good it was for them to suffer, and how great a sign of Divine favour was affliction; when they grew old she pensioned them; when they married she set them up in blankets, crockery and a copper kettle; she never scolded, even when displeased, and she rewarded them for well-doing liberally. For all that, this gentlewoman who reminded one of some faint and exquisite perfume, like dried rose-leaves still sweet even in their decay, thought the humanity of the lower class something different from her own, and looked on the endeavour to educate them as the beginning of social strife, the starting-point of revolution, and flying in the face of Providence in a wild and wilful way.

“Oh, I know that you think me a horrid hard-hearted little monster!” laughed Theodosia gaily. “But you see I am not so bad as you make out; and I have always liked poor Grace.”

“I am glad of it, my dear,” said Mrs. Barrington

kindly. "And Grace is a good girl, poor thing, and does her work very creditably."

"Yes, she is very nice," said Theodosia; and Mrs. Barrington looked pleased.

All the same it was fortunate she did not put any leading questions. Had she done so, she would have found that Theodosia did not know whether the girl, whose efficient service she had commended, were the house-maid or the lady's-maid.

Presently Dr. St. Claire came into the room. With that easy grace of his which seemed to assert and claim absolute equality even with the proudest, he came up to where the three ladies were sitting, and offered his hand as if he had been Edward Formby himself. Mrs. Barrington would have liked it better if he had not. But when her sense of station and her sweetness of nature came into collision, the latter always won the day, and she was sure to forgive what she did not approve. People do not mean to do wrong, she argued. They sin chiefly from ignorance. And at the worst it is right to forgive.

"How do you find poor Grace?" she asked with kindly anxiety.

"She is very ill," said Dr. St. Claire. "She has double pneumonia, and her state is critical."

Mrs. Barrington's mild face grew anxious.

"Poor thing!" she said compassionately. "I am indeed grieved to hear this; but I was afraid she was very ill."

"I am so sorry! Poor Grace!" said Monica, looking up with her whole heart of compassion in her eyes.

"Is it catching?" asked Theodosia, her cheeks

dyed crimson for fear. "Mamma!" she added excitedly; "do be careful! do mind what you are about!"

"No, it is not infectious," said Armine reassuringly. "I would not allow you to remain here if it were!"

"How nice of him to say that!" thought Anthony's wife, taking the pronoun to herself, and sending for acknowledgment a pretty half-grateful half-roguish look to the thoughtful and clever young doctor who took such especial care of her safety.

He, on his part, glanced at Monica, then fixed his eyes steadily on her mother. Young Mrs. Barrington had not been in his thoughts.

"I should urge her removal from the Dower House if there were risk to you in her remaining," he continued. "But you need have no fear. The illness is severe and will be long; but it is not dangerous to others. Only, she will require good nursing and great care."

"My servants are always well looked after when they are ill," said Mrs. Barrington, a trifle stiffly. "Tell me what has to be done and your orders will be obeyed to the letter."

He told her the usual routine of equable temperature, and the like, adding: "I gave all these instructions upstairs, to the—house-keeper?—the person they called Mrs. James."

"My maid. But I would rather go and see for myself personally," answered Mrs. Barrington, rising.

She expected the young doctor to leave the room with her. Instead of which he simply went to the door, opened it for her to pass through, then came back to where Monica was sitting, still with her wood-work in her hand.



"This is pretty," he said, taking it from her in the most natural way of equal comradeship imaginable; "and well done. Would you like me to lend you some patterns, Miss Barrington? I have some good designs which have not been published and are therefore quite fresh. Shall I bring them up with me this evening when I come to see the servant?"

"Thank you, yes, I shall be glad to have some new patterns. I did not know that you carved," said Monica, pleasantly smiling as she spoke.

"A little. I do a little of many things," he answered, also smiling and speaking pleasantly.

"I am glad you carve, for then we can exchange our patterns. One gets so tired of things, looking at them so long before one begins to work on them! They seem to lose all their freshness and interest by being looked at," said Monica.

"Do you soon get tired of things, Miss Barrington?" asked Dr. St. Claire.

He was looking intently at the acorns on the frame, and he spoke in the indifferent way of a man asking a half-foolish and totally unimportant question. But his voice had a curious little tremor in it, and his breath came just a trifle checked and hard.

"I do of wood-work patterns, when I have them a long time before beginning to work on them," said Monica with simple literalness. "But in general I do not soon tire of things."

"Of people?" asked Armine with the same strange undercurrent of emotion beneath an exterior as calm as if he were making a professional diagnosis.

"Of people, never!" she answered emphatically, thinking of her mother.

"No; there is a good reason for that," said Theodosia with her shrill laugh. "As you care nothing for anybody, I do not see how you can get tired. You must have, Monica, before you can lose."

St. Claire raised his eyes to Monica and as suddenly let them fall. Hers were turned on him in the fixed way of one whose mind is preoccupied. She was thinking of his question, and her answer, and now of Theodosia's commentary; she was not thinking of him personally. But when their eyes met, hers dropped as suddenly as his. Something seemed to have passed between them which made her abashed and him afraid—she abashed by what she saw, he afraid of what he felt and what he knew that she had seen. Fortunately at that moment young Mrs. Barrington was looking at herself in the hand-glass by which Monica judged the better of her work by reflection, and thus saw nothing of that look which had told so much. When she looked again at St. Claire there was nothing to see. The young doctor was a man of self-control and a quick recovery.

"Do you carve, Mrs. Barrington?" he asked in quite his usual manner—that manner which was so sweet and tender, so almost caressing in its tones and gestures.

"No. I do not care for making clumsy knobs or cutting little holes in bits of wood. It seems so silly!" Theo answered with a laugh. "It is no better than that ridiculous open-work embroidery which ladies used to be mad about a few years ago—cutting holes in a piece of cambric and then sewing them up again! I think all that kind of thing so intensely stupid. I

like lawn-tennis and billiards and quick riding so much better. I hate all missy things."

And at this she laughed again, and looked at Monica as the point of her aim.

"It's a pity you do not carve; you would find it very interesting. And it is not difficult; in fact it is wonderfully easy in proportion to the results," answered Armine, passing over the items of her disclaimer and going back on the central fact.

"Should I? As you recommend it so strongly, Dr. St. Claire, I think I will try it. Your advice is like a prescription," she added with a naughty smile; "a prescription which somehow one must obey."

She meant to please the young man by this flattering attention to his wishes, poor fellow! And when she had pleased him, what then? *Chi lo sa?* She was one of those women who put their foolish heads into bags and run among the quicksands, never looking to their feet.

"Will you teach me, Monica?" she continued, looking at St. Claire as if she wished him to take up the offer.

"Yes, with pleasure," answered Monica.

Armine said nothing.

"And perhaps you will lend me some patterns, too?" continued Theodosia, turning to him. "I know all Monica's by heart, and I am tired of them."

"Willingly," he answered, with his best air of a disguised prince.

And yet he would rather that she had not asked him, and that Monica had been the only one to profit by his store. He was a generous young fellow by nature, with a hand as open as if he counted his for-

tune by pounds where he reckoned it by pence. All the same, in this matter he felt mean and churlish, and wished that young Mrs. Barrington had not asked him for the loan of a few patterns of wood-carving.

"And yet it is better," he said to himself.

But why should it be better? How could there be two sides—a better or a worse—to such a simple thing?

Soon after this Mrs. Barrington returned, and they had a little talk about the sick girl and her condition; and when this was over, the doctor's visit was also necessarily at an end, and he took his leave, as he ought to have done a quarter of an hour ago.

"I will bring up the patterns this evening," he said as he was shaking hands with Monica.

If you speak while you are shaking hands, it seems only natural to hold the hand for as long as the speech lasts. There was nothing unseemly then, in Dr. St. Claire's holding Miss Barrington's hand while he said this; but Monica's face, usually so colourless, flushed crimson; yet she did not withdraw her hand. If her blush betokened vexation, would she not have done so? he thought. He forgot that other explanation of a girl's passivity—her reluctance to show that she has seen, felt, or understood.

"Of what patterns was Dr. St. Claire speaking, my dear?" asked Mrs. Barrington when he had gone.

Monica told her mother what, after all, was not much to tell—simply the loan of a few quasi-artistic designs.

"Is not this rather a familiarity?" asked Mrs. Barrington, her feelings of caste breaking through her Christian kindness in the odd contradictory way cha-

racteristic of her. "Remember, my dear, though he is a very creditably conducted young man by all accounts, and, I believe, really skilful in his profession, he is not a gentleman, and we know nothing of him. He must not be encouraged to forget his place and to act as if he were our equal."

"I could scarcely refuse, dear mother, could I?" returned Monica. "He made the offer very naturally and kindly. I think I could scarcely have refused it."

Soul of honour as she was, she said nothing of the look which had made her cower down and had made him tremble. Looks are not evidence like words or deeds, and they are always liable to misinterpretation.

"Perhaps not, my dear," answered Mrs. Barrington. "You could not be rude at any time. But it was rather forward on his part, and I am sorry for it."

Monica looked troubled. It was so seldom that her mother had to take a reproving tone where she was concerned, that she scarcely knew herself now when, if St. Claire were to blame for proposing this little interchange of friendly courtesies, she was also to blame for accepting it. Her face showed her trouble so plainly, that her mother's heart softened and her mild annoyance passed like the mist of a summer morning.

"I dare say I am a little too particular," she said tenderly and with a reassuring smile. "I am old-fashioned, you know! Of course he meant it kindly, poor young man; and we ought to take things as they are meant."

"I was here all the time, and I saw nothing forward in it," said Theodosia rather sharply.

She was displeased that her mother-in-law should

make so much of Monica's share in the matter. It overshadowed her own.

"No?" returned Mrs. Barrington. "Then I dare say I am wrong."

"And he is going to lend me some patterns as well; so it was not only Monica of whom he thought," continued this young woman hardily.

"Yes?" said Mrs. Barrington. "It is all right, I make no doubt, my dear. But, if I were you, I would be a little careful how you encourage anything like an intimacy with the young man. I know my son, and I know his extreme particularity."

"And I know my husband, mamma," retorted Theodosia. "Anthony is not such a goose as to object to such a little thing as this. We are not so many Grand Lamas and poor Dr. St. Claire a mere crossing-sweeper."

"My dear Theodosia, it is really impossible to talk to you!" said Mrs. Barrington with the irritability which her daughter-in-law alone, but she so often, aroused in her. "You have allowed yourself to get into such a disastrous habit of exaggeration, it is really impossible to discuss anything with you on reasonable grounds! Grand Lamas! Crossing-sweepers! What a tone to take! It is not worthy of you, nor of me, Theodosia!"

"I wonder what you would do, mamma, if you had not me to find fault with!" said Theodosia. "I declare I do not think you see an inch of good in me from my head to my feet. Poor Anthony! how you must pity him!"

"Theo, come and see the new kittens," said Monica suddenly. "They are such dear little mites, and have

such a nice bed in the library. Will you come? The mother looks just like the White Cat."

"Yes, and I will not come back here again, mamma," said Theodosia, rising. "So good-bye; and try to think a little less badly of me if you can—for Anthony's sake, if not for my own. I know, of course, that I am nothing to you; but as Anthony's mother, it would be more convenient if you thought his wife less of a monster than you do."

"I was not aware that I thought you a monster, Theodosia," said Mrs. Barrington coldly.

"Oh yes, you do, mamma! You think me a toad, or a frog, or something horrid, I know—perhaps a cockatrice!" she added as her latest shaft, following Monica briskly out of the room.

"My dear," said Mrs. Barrington, when Theodosia had gone and Monica had returned; "that poor girl becomes more and more intolerable every day of her life! I really sometimes fear that she is not quite right in her mind—she has such extraordinary crazes, now on one thing, and now on another."

"She is very volatile," said Monica, thinking it less rasping and more soothing to agree in part than to deny wholly.

"Volatile! She is indeed that, and more," said her mother. "If she is going to make herself as ridiculous by her patronage of this young man as she has of others, I do not know what we shall do nor what will happen. Indulgent as your brother is to her—"weak" she would have said had she spoken as she felt; as every woman would say of her male relation whose wife she does not like and whom he does not desert—"indulgent and generous to a fault,"

she repeated, "I do not think he will approve of her taking up this young man, and making him her latest pet, as she did with James Solly's son. It is really too distressing to see her so silly and thoughtless!"

"I do not think she means to do wrong, but she is, as you say, dear mother, very thoughtless," returned Monica. "I do not think that you need worry yourself, however, about Dr. St. Claire," she added.

"Why should I not, when I see such folly?" returned her mother. "How can I help worrying myself?"

"But he is too good and wise to be drawn into anything questionable," answered Monica. "And it would be very questionable if he allowed Theodosia to befriend him more than Anthony would like. In things of this kind husband and wife must go together," she added sagely.

"As for that, your brother sees only with her eyes," returned Mrs. Barrington. "She can do what she likes with him. He seems to be really—what shall I say?—besotted—under a spell—with respect to her."

"He certainly does love her very much," said Monica. "So I suppose she shows the best of herself to him. You see, mother, she must have a best to show."

"Well, there is no use in looking at things from the dark side only," said Mrs. Barrington with a gentle kind of sigh, her irritation passed and her sweeter nature once more regnant. "She is very light-minded, and not the person I should have chosen for your dear brother's wife had I been allowed a voice in the matter. But time works wonders, and I hope time



will make her a little more wise and staid than she is now."

"Yes, I hope so too. She is very good-natured," said Monica.

"And very foolish," returned her mother. "But she means no harm, I dare say."

"I am sure she does not," said Monica, sure of nothing of the kind, but glad to throw oil on all disturbed waters and to brood, dove-like, over all eggs of peace.

"My good child!" said Mrs. Barrington fondly. "Always my sweet peace-maker! Ah, Monica, what should I do without you? The day when you leave me will be the saddest of my life—the day when you disappointed me would be my day of doom! I could never outlive a sorrow from you."

"You shall never have one, that I can help, mother," said her daughter, going over to her, and kissing her. "You are my first care and my only love. I live only for you—and shall to the end."

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## CHAPTER IV.

## THE PAST AND PRESENT.

MRS. BARRINGTON was right:—they knew very little about the young doctor who had settled among them. Though his manner was perfect, his skill unquestionable, and his year's conduct blameless, yet these were his sole credentials. And British respectability in high places likes to have something more solid in the retrospect before it commits itself to the freemasonry of adoption and equality. Perhaps had it known all it would have given the sign and password to Armine; perhaps not. Social Brahminism is a capricious foster-mother, and nourishes one outlying member while it starves another with bewildering injustice.

There was not much chance, however, that it would be called on to exercise judgment in the case of St. Claire. For though he sometimes spoke of his father, more frequently of his mother, and often of the time when he lived in France, he spoke only in general, and always changed the conversation when it drifted too near to details. Hence he gave no one the power of choosing between what had been in the past and what was in the present—nor of deciding whether they would receive him for the sake of the former or exclude him because of the latter. Oakhurst judged of him only by things as they were, and things as they had been did not enter into its calculations.

Yet his story, secret as he kept it, had nothing in it dishonouring to his name if much that was grievous to his feelings. Nevertheless it was scarcely one he cared to tell, and it was only natural that he should hide it with such care as of itself to cause suspicion.

The St. Claires had been rich men in England for the last three generations. The founder of the family in Perfidious Albion, M. le Marquis de Sainte Claire, a royalist exile of '92, had been for one while poor enough. Ultimately he married an heiress to whom he had given French lessons, whereby he made his own fortune, and, gentleman "de la vieille roche" as he was, did not mar hers. His son succeeded to the property; cultivated English sympathies; dropped both the Marquis and the De which his father had retained; called himself plain John Clare, Esq.; was proud of his maternal ancestry; and tried to forget that he had inherited French blood from his father. He was more "John Bull" than many who ethnologically are all Bull, and those stood best with him who complimented him with most unctious on his thoroughly English characteristics, and the fine patriotism of his politics.

His son again, Armine's father, went back to the Gallic strain; took up his marquise; liked nothing so well as to call himself French; and blasphemed the British intermixture in his veins as if it had been so much muddy water poured into wine. He repudiated all connection with that unpatriotic Clare; married a Parisienne pur sang and went in for the right thing and philological exactness. He was the Marquis de Sainte Claire; and he was fond of saying with a broad British accent: "Nous autres," and "Nous Français." He had no pride in his position as an English land-

owner, but coveted that estate at Tours which had been his forefathers' in the days before the assembling of the States General. When therefore the railroad was taken through an outlying portion of his property, he sold the whole thing out of hand, and went off to Tours, as a Mohammedan might have gone to Mecca. Here his wife died, and the star of his prosperity set.

At this time young Armine was about sixteen, as beautiful and tender as the Apollo Sauroctonos. His mother's death nearly broke his heart, and did slightly disturb his father's brain. The poor widower tried to overcome his sorrow by excitement, and took to gambling on the Bourse according to the prevailing madness of the time. Eager and extreme as he was by nature, he followed the crowd with a swift step and an unsteady head. At first he did well. The demon who watches over gamblers baited his hook with a florid fly, and at one moment the Marquis de Sainte Claire had doubled, and at another trebled, his original capital. But he played the game too long and followed the fly too far. He drifted on to the rapids; and then he shot Niagara. One morning he woke to find himself in the boiling surf below, hopelessly ruined. Out of the wreck of his fortune he managed to save just enough to start his son in a profession and provide himself with a decent funeral.

The fancy of the lad, at a time when costly fancies were the legitimate outfalls of his wealth, had gone to science and the microscope. For all his beauty he had some sterling stuff beneath his clustering curls; and for all his manner and what would seem to be his natural rôle of carpet-knight and lady-killer, he had aspirations and ideals like men of fewer tempta-

tions. He was in the phase of humanitarianism and the worship of science when this ruin came upon him. When he realised the fact that he had to till his own field and work his own mine, he turned what had been an intellectual pleasure to practical account, and entered himself as a student of medicine in Paris and afterwards in London.

When his last examination was passed and his hand was ready for the plough, the money saved from the wreck had run out and his father's work was done. One morning the poor ruined Marquis was found lying peacefully asleep in his narrow bed—that sleep which knows no waking. A small bottle of cyanide of potassium was lying empty on the floor, and the manner of that sudden death—the reason of the froth hanging about those pale lips—was too patent to be denied.

This then was the reason why Armine spoke so seldom of his past and gave so few particulars of his family. Pecuniary ruin and paternal suicide are not pleasant supporters for a coat-of-arms; and between sacredness and sorrow he felt that reticence was better than confidence. He had nothing to hide if need be that he should confess; but also he had much that he did not wish to disclose voluntarily and unnecessarily. Hence he held his peace and kept his family history like a book closely sealed from prying eyes; and the world speculated on the secret writing in vain.

It was not long after his father's death that St. Claire, who had come over to England, heard of this modest practice at Oakhurst, which had become vacant by the death of Dr. Brown. He went down; paid a small sum for fixtures, goodwill, and lease; took

up his quarters in the deceased doctor's house; added his own door-plate; re-papered the surgery; laid in a stock of new instruments; and stepped into the lapsed practice like so much inherited plate and linen. Miss Maria Crosby, the paupers, the "second set," and the servants at the grand houses, all fell into his hand; and there was no one to oppose him. The only word said in his disfavour was, that he was too young and too handsome for the requirements of the place. As time went on, these two objections fell by familiarity into the background, and then the pegs of dissatisfaction were to be found in these questions: Who is he? Where does he come from? What is his family and what are his antecedents? Why does he never tell us anything about himself? Why has he no visible friends nor relations in England? Why is he so sad and reserved? And, how does he, a mere country doctor as he is, without private fortune, manage to be so like a young prince in disguise and to have all those accomplishments which only rich men can give their sons?

His history, had it been known, would have answered all these questions. The luxurious education of his well-found youth had made him the accomplished gentleman he was. His mother's untimely death, his loss of fortune, his father's tragic end, had thrown that air of melancholy about him which so strangely moved the world of women, besides making him discreet and reserved as to all the rest. He could not speak of his past, partly because he would not run the risk of looking like a snob by boasting of his former vanished grandeur; partly because he did not choose to set the social sleuth-hounds on his trail.

But neither would he be drawn into close friendships with people on a par with his present, but below the line of his former, place. If he might not dwell on his own inherited level he would not build below it. Hence, among other disagreeables he was the veritable flying-fish of the community—not accepted as an equal by his natural peers and not choosing to make himself the comrade of his present equals. It was an unpleasant position; but he could not improve it. But though he was not a strong man he was both reasonable and sweet-tempered. And these make a moral amalgam as serviceable in its own way as that more fibrous quality known as force of character.

Grace at the Dower House continued seriously ill. Double pneumonia is not a trifling ailment anywhere, but when it comes during the harsh spring winds of England, the risk to life is naturally increased, and the necessity for constant medical attendance more and more urgent. It was in the received order of things, then, that young Dr. St. Claire should go every day, and in the beginning twice a day, to the Dower House; and that when he went, he should see Mrs. Barrington in the drawing-room to make a more accurate report than even the trained nurse could do. This was his duty as also her desire; and had it been even against his own wishes he would have been bound to fulfil the one and gratify the other. As things were, it was not against his wishes; and in this manner at least his duty ran curricula with his pleasure.

He was thus thrown much with Monica in these later times; and if Mrs. Barrington never forgot that this well-bred, pleasing, handsome young man was only the country doctor, her daughter sometimes did, and

Armine himself, always. He had established a community of pursuits and tastes between Monica and himself which had both its charm and danger. He not only lent her designs for her wood-carving—often made by himself—and gave her a few extra dodges, as he called his deft manipulation of tools, but also brought up his favourite books—for the most part poems with passages vigorously under-scored, and cognate passages in other poets jotted down in the margin like Variorum readings. As he always acted openly and straightforwardly, and offered his loans, while he discussed their merits, in Mrs. Barrington's presence, that gentle woman, whose creed of caste was so diametrically opposed to her daily practice and Christian philosophy, never found the time nor occasion when to interfere or deny. It would have been too ill-bred to have refused these little attentions; which, after all, she thought, meant nothing so much as the young man's own intellectual relief. It must be very dull for him at Oakhurst, as she said more than once to Monica. Among his own class who could possibly be a congenial companion for him, so highly educated as he was, and with so much native refinement as to make him almost like a real gentleman! It must therefore be pleasant to him to talk on the subjects which interested him to people like themselves, who could understand him; and it was only right to help young men to keep themselves select and out of low company. It all showed a very nice taste in him; and as it committed themselves to nothing doubtful she was not sorry to lend that helping hand to masculine virtue which good women think they give to young men, when, at five o'clock, they hand them



cups of tepid tea and nice little slices of thin brown bread and butter.

"It gives him something to look forward to, poor young man," dear Mrs. Barrington used to say with gentle benevolence, making a kind of self-excuse for a practical democracy not naturally in her line.

"Yes," said Monica.

"And keeps him out of low company," said Mrs. Barrington.

"Yes," answered Monica again.

"So many country doctors take to drinking habits, it is only right to do what one can to save this poor young man from such a fate!"

"Yes," said Monica again; this time with a certain hesitation and a sudden feeling of revulsion.

In her heart she thought it not very likely that Armine St. Claire would fall into drinking habits or take to low company with or without their five o'clock cups of tea. But she did say so. She had an idea that it was the best policy not to make herself too decidedly the young man's champion.

"What books did he bring you this morning, my dear?" Mrs. Barrington went on to ask.

Monica laid her long white hand on two books beside her.

"One of Matthew Arnold's, and one of De Musset's," she replied.

"And you lent him—?"

"Adelaide Proctor and Jean Ingelow."

"These are sweet and harmless, being written by women," said Mrs. Barrington. "I am not so sure of his choice. French literature is always doubtful—and who was this De Musset?"

"I have not read him yet," answered Monica. "But I believe he is beautiful."

"He may be dangerous all the same, my dear," said the mother anxiously. "And I have forgotten all my French, so that I cannot read and judge for myself. You must be careful, Monica."

"Yes, mother, I will."

"And if you come upon anything doubtful, you must put away the book at once."

"Yes, mother. But I do not think Dr. St. Claire would lend me anything in the least degree doubtful," she added very gently.

"He knows too much of French literature, my dear, for my taste," said Mrs. Barrington with an air of conviction. "We all know how hopelessly corrupt it is."

Her daughter said no more. She always knew when to give in so that a discussion should not broaden into an argument; for Mrs. Barrington, like most women, disliked to be pushed into dialectical corners, and nothing disturbed her more than to be forced to trace her assertions to their foundations in fact. This was not because she was arrogant, but because she was timid, and it must be confessed intellectually indolent; and it annoyed her to be made to clear out her own obscure places.

Meanwhile the illness of poor Grace went through its appointed stages, and the intercourse between the young doctor and the ladies of the Dower House grew insensibly closer and more intimate, as mental and personal harmonies overpowered conventional discords. One by one all Mrs. Barrington's faint suspicions were set to rest. She even tolerated French authors of

whom she knew nothing, save their nationality; and found pleasure in those sweet and simple little Romances whereof she knew neither the meaning nor the effect. To please her, the young man learnt one or two of Claribel's most touching songs; and it became almost as regular a thing as the cup of afternoon tea, to ask Dr. St. Claire to go to the piano and sing "one of his sweet little songs."

This was only when the mother and daughter were alone. When Theodosia was there the talk on literature was restricted, the practice of music was nil, and all things became stiffer, more reserved and less genial. Theodosia kept the ball rolling on her own account and in her own way, and would have been horribly disappointed had things been on the æsthetic footing which was the rule when she was absent. She always made Mrs. Barrington cross, Monica uneasy, and Armine somewhat embarrassed when she came. But perhaps this restraint was better for them all than too much of that sweet seductive intercourse which had even invaded Mrs. Barrington's sense of fitness and had given such dangerous reality to Monica's dreams.

One day Armine found Miss Barrington alone. Her mother was engaged for the moment in the library, where she transacted all her business. One of Anthony's tenants had come to ask her to intercede for him about the renewal of his lease on the old terms; and as his story was pitiable and Anthony had been manifestly harsh and unjust, the dear woman felt bound to listen to the end, if with no certainty of ultimate good, yet with the feeling of giving present consolation. And even an hour snatched from pain counted for something in her estimate of things.

Thus Dr. St. Claire and Monica were left for about a quarter of an hour alone—the first time such a chance had befallen them.

The conversation somehow turned on the modern outbreak of individualism and public ambition in women; and Armine, though against all excess, as was to be expected from a man of his type, was so far a child of the generation as to be the champion of a certain amount of free will and independence in women, especially in those things which were in themselves beautiful. Monica, on the contrary, represented the seclusion of home and the wholly domestic duties of past ages.

“A certain amount?” she said with a smile. “But does not it not all depend on what is that certain amount? What one person thinks allowable, a second thinks is not enough, and a third too much. So where are we to fix the line?”

“Where would *you* place it?” he asked, looking into her eyes.

“I? oh! I am not of the modern school at all,” she answered, her colour deepening. “My mother’s will is my rule of right, and my home the dearest and happiest place in the world.”

“Still, if not for yourself, you might make limits for others,” he said. “All young ladies are not so fortunate as you, either in circumstance or disposition. What would you do with one who had a very pronounced artistic or intellectual gift—Rosa Bonheur say, Mrs. Siddons, Grisi, Mrs. Somerville?—would you have had all these quench the light that was in them for the sake of leading purely domestic lives?”

“No, not these,” said Monica, to whom, as to others,

the success of a thing already done creates its own principle but gives no precedent for the unknown.

"Then if not these, why any?" he asked, smiling.

"But these were such glorious women!" she answered naïvely.

"They proved their gloriousness only by trial," he argued. "We are all potentialities of unknown value till we are tested. While in the egg an eagle is indistinguishable from a vulture or a barndoor fowl, and incubation, which is proof, alone shows the difference. The analogy holds good for mental powers. If we are not allowed endeavour, there can be no success, and the divine fire within us dies down for want of air to feed it and space wherein to burn."

"But true genius always makes its way. It is irrepressible," said Monica.

"You mean that when it does, it does," he answered. "And what about the mute, inglorious Miltons who never get a chance to show what is in them?—the buried seeds which are not helped to come to the light and have not power of themselves to lift up the paving-stone? Had these women we have spoken of been forcibly kept from following the bent of their genius, they would not have been the shining lights they were. But how many would not have been as great if they could but have had the means of showing themselves? And surely in the rising generation of girls there are some as gifted as those who have gone before, and who want only leave to develop—only the liberty to rise to their full height. As I said; disallow endeavour, and success is impossible."

"Still it is better for girls to be dutiful to their parents, and content to remain at home, than to be

just like so many boys, restless and dissatisfied till they can go out into the world and fling off all the duties of family life for ambition and excitement," said Monica, womanlike escaping from the logical consequences of an argument by doubling back on the main principle.

"Certainly. All the same, genius should have its possibilities of expression," said Armine. "And beautiful as the home life is—and no one values it more than I," he said with strange emphasis—"there are times when most young people feel that it is both restricted and arid. You yourself, Miss Barrington, are there never days when you dream of a wider horizon—a more purely ideal existence?"

He drew his bow at a venture, and the shaft struck home. He was startled, and more than startled, by the expression which came into Monica's usually still and dreamy face. Her large soft eyes blazed with sudden fire; her cheeks grew pale with living passion; her lips half parted; her head was thrown back; her whole air and attitude rapt, yearning, full of unspoken aspiration and unsatisfied desire, told the hidden story of her mind, the secret of her life.

"Oh!" she said in a low moved voice, clasping her hands together, "if only I could!"

For a moment she hid her face behind those hands still clasped together, the fingers tightly interlaced and the palms turned outward; and the silence which follows an astounding revelation fell between them. When she lowered her hands and looked up, the fire had died down, the passion had burned itself out, and only the soft, sad, dreamy quiescence of her usual self remained.

"Obedience to parents is the best of all things," she said gently; and her voice sounded like a sigh.

St. Claire was looking at her earnestly; so earnestly that she could not meet his eyes.

"You hold this obedience high?" he said, speaking slowly.

"Yes, I do," she answered.

"Above all other things?"

"Yes," she said again. "Obedience at least to a mother from a daughter."

"To the extinction of genius, by which an art would be perfected and humanity improved?"

"I cannot even imagine the circumstances where it would not be be first and highest duty—where it would not be better to make one's mother happy than to earn distinction for oneself and to please a multitude," she answered.

"You advocate, then, the sacrifice of every form of personal desire to this same principle?" he added, not looking at her but carefully examining the edge of one of her wood-work tools.

"Yes," she answered.

"You would fling your lover overboard at the desire of your parents? You would never be Juliet? Yet how much poorer both the world and life would be without that love, stronger than death, which broke through all barriers and defied even a parent's will!"

As he spoke his voice trembled in spite of himself. He had wished to appear calm and disinterested, not taking advantage of that sudden revelation of hidden life, and putting an hypothetical case quite impartially. But that tell-tale voice betrayed him more than he desired.

A deep blush came into Monica's face and stayed there, burning like fire on her cheeks. She recovered herself, and answered with studied indifference:

"All this is a question with which I have nothing to do—never could have anything to do. If my mother wished me to marry, I would; and I would not if she did not wish it."

"You would yield yourself in implicit obedience, without will or choice of your own?"

"Yes; without will or choice of my own, she said.

"You would marry where you did not love?" refuse where you did?"

"It should be entirely as my mother wished," was her reply.

He turned away. His heart was full of pain, and his face expressed his trouble. He did not know if she had or had not understood him—nor whether she had answered simply, according to the faith that was in her, or with purpose, to warn him betimes. Either way she had been explicit; and she had spoken as if she had meant what she said—as if it were a vital and active principle of her life, and not one merely adapted for show and the occasion. Before all things then, she was a Daughter; and neither her individuality nor her love, neither intellect nor passion, counted in comparison with her devotion to her mother. It was a lesson which she had set him to learn—hard, distasteful, desolating; but he must take it to heart and abide by its teaching.

All this passed through his mind like successive waves of pain, while she, with her face still deeply



flushed, but strangely fixed and rigid, sat carelessly turning over the leaves of a book—seeing nothing of the pages which she was making such heroic endeavours to appear to read—that she might accentuate still more pointedly her personal unconcern in the conversation on hand.

A dead silence fell again between them, and for several moments neither spoke. At last Armine said, in a low and altered voice:

“Your obedience is sublime, Miss Barrington; but—may I say so without impertinence?—you carry your principle too far. Your virtue goes over to the other side.”

“Do you think so?” she answered, still turning over the leaves of the book. “I think that is impossible.”

“And that other?—that other whose life you mar?—whose heart you break,” said Armine, in a tender, pleading way.

“There must never be that other,” said Monica very gently, but firmly also. “He would be warned in time.”

“And if love were stronger than prudence? and warnings were like waves beating against the sea-wall?” Armine asked.

She raised her eyes and looked him full and calmly in the face. This was a point whereon she felt strong, and could afford to look the whole world in the face.

“In that case,” she said quietly, “there would be two martyrs to principle instead of one. But the principle of my devotion to my mother, and of my entire obedience to her, would be always paramount.”

At this moment Mrs. Barrington entered the room

having finished her colloquy with the poor fellow whom her son was bent on ruining for punishment of some fancied insolence, and the young doctor could say no more. So much had the conversation taught him, that Monica would never cross her mother's will for love of living man, and that he who would win her must first gain the favour of sweet-natured and exclusive Mrs. Barrington—that model of gracious Christian practice and high-caste Brahminical principle.

"I am sorry to have detained you so long, Dr. St. Claire," she said, coming forward with that quickened step which means apology and redeeming by seconds the time that has been lost in hours.

"It does not signify," he answered with conventional politeness. "I am not busy to-day."

Had he spoken as he felt, he would have thanked her for her delay. Assuredly there was nothing in it to regret, save perhaps that result of sadder knowledge.

"And Grace?" the lady asked, still standing.

He went into the present aspect of the case, superficially, giving just so much professional accuracy as he thought well—no more. As he added a few technical terms, judiciously thrown in, the dear woman was perfectly satisfied, flattered by this compliment to her supposed knowledge, and possessed of the belief that now she understood the whole science and mystery of double pneumonia, with its dangers, its difficulties, and its remedies. He took his leave so soon as he had made his report; as was expected of him. But when he said good-morning to Monica, he did not shake hands with her as usual.

Deeply flushed as her face already was, the hard

colour in her cheeks burnt with increased fire as she raised her dark-grey eyes with a sudden half-shy and half-reproachful look to his. Did that look really mean a half-reproach to him, or was he foolish for thinking that it did? He could not now cross the room and go round to where she stood, merely to shake hands with her as a sign of reconciliation and to lift off that dumb reproach!

He would had he dared; but he dared not. What would Mrs. Barrington think? and Monica herself? and the chance that his interpretation was a mistake? And yet, it might be true!

It was a small matter for a man to worry about—an apparently trivial, worthless, insignificant and utterly absurd little matter. Yet it threw him into a strange fever of uncertainty and contradictory self-reproach, as he drove through the country lanes on his various errands of healing or despair. He was in a strange state of fever and uncertainty altogether to-day. Never before had he found it so difficult to harmonise his life and co-ordinate possibilities with desires—never before had the difference between a man's social credit and personal worth seemed to him so bewildering, and the world's award so unequal and unjust. By birth, education, and inherited status he stood every inch Monica Barrington's equal; by his father's misfortunes and his own present circumstances he was immeasurably her inferior. Must then the lowered social standard of his present condition absolutely and for ever destroy the higher measure of his past? or might that higher measure and his own individual worth exalt and ennoble the lower social standard of his present condi-

tion? Might the son of the Marquis de Sainte Claire claim as his equal the daughter of the Barringtons? or was the country doctor at Oakhurst worse than mad to aspire to an alliance with one of the oldest of the county families of Fellshire?

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CHAPTER V.  
MAKING HIS WAY.

WITH unconscious hypocrisy Dr. St. Claire made that kind of love to Mrs. Barrington which young men are wont to make to elderly women when they wish to get something out of them—whether it be present patronage or a future legacy, an invitation to dinner, a loan of doubtful repayment, or leave to marry the daughter. He talked to her on her favourite subjects; followed her lead whether he agreed with her or no; and always let her have the last word. He asked her advice on private little matters of his own, where he said he felt at sea, and where the judgment of such a person as herself was invaluable. By the policy of instinct rather than by the forecasting of design, he threw into his manner a certain almost filial tone of half-caressing tenderness—that kind of tenderness which she had often missed and always regretted in Anthony. But he was profoundly respectful withal; having that rare gift, accorded to so few—the power of showing respect through familiarity, and of being caressing, tender and intimate, but neither forward nor obtrusive.

He made his professional visits to the sick maid a pleasant domestic feature in the lady's day, and brought with him a sense of moral sunshine which brightened for the time the colourless atmosphere of

the Dower House. And as all that he did was done with sincerity of feeling, if the end was somewhat different from what appeared, Mrs. Barrington had never cause to be startled and was content with things as they were.

Most of all she was content with this nice young fellow who made himself so agreeable, and who was creeping slowly but surely into the sacred place of her affections. She sincerely liked him for what he was—a man who was not her social equal, but whose humanity was refreshing and delightful in its own way. His manners were quiet, his attitudes graceful, his words well-chosen, and the tones of his voice were harmonious and sympathetic. He had no strong views on any subject and he was well-informed on all. He was without violent antipathies or inconvenient enthusiasms, and he had neither intellectual crazes nor overpowering passions. When he talked it was with judgment and moderation. His topics were never painful and always free from doubtful issues. He never touched the bolder chords, the darker themes of life or human nature, and he was eminently safe and soothing. His conversation, with its mild optimism and level philosophy, refreshed Mrs. Barrington, where that of others exhausted her. For the old value this kind of moral quietude more than the vigorous young can understand. The fiery passions, the tumultuous emotions, the mental unrest, the very intellectual earnestness itself of youth, fatigues them like bodily exertion, or the restless activities of children; while the mild, calm, equable temper, the superficial philosophy which looks only on the bright side of things and leaves the dark alone, is in harmony with their con-

dition, and suits them like the noon-day turn in the garden, the evening game at *bézique*, and the gossip columns of the newspaper, which make up the sum of their exertions and emotions.

Mrs. Barrington took it all as it came to her; and that the young man should be so mad, so wicked, as to seek to please her for the sake of her daughter, was a contingency as far from her mind as that he should plan a robbery or commit a murder. Good women, who have lived all their lives in the country, are not prone to think evil of their neighbours. They know too little of the realities of life to have had their senses sharpened by experience at first hand; and the close-set borders of their own "*huis-clos*" have not been pierced by information from others. Things therefore, which to those who know the world are accepted as matters of course, are to them either absolutely unknown or anathema maranatha—the possibility of which is not to be received in decent society. Wherefore Mrs. Barrington believed that Dr. St. Claire's attentions to her were the result of his natural sweetness, which made him wish to please her for her own sake; and as she would as soon have suspected the footman of cherishing a tender passion for her daughter as she would have suspected him, she received all his pleasant ways with gentle cordiality and a benevolent kind of condescension to which her age, state, temper and bearing gave a special charm.

What Monica thought remained her own secret only. She made no confidences and betrayed no consciousness; and Theodosia, who often found herself at five o'clock tea at the Dower House, saw nothing more than it was intended she should see. For certain

reasons of her own, and always following up the bewildering lead which she had made for herself, she could not possibly suppose that her quiet sister-in-law had any attraction for one whom she was resolute to see only as the pitiable victim of a hopeless attachment to herself. She was always very kind to the young doctor. She meant to be provocative; but the dew of her coquetry fell on stony and ungrateful soil; and had Armine been able to read the secret writing of Theodosia's heart towards him, he would have been as utterly astounded as would gentle Mrs. Barrington had she been able to read that little love poem printed on his and addressed to her daughter. It was a game of blind man's buff all round, and no one knew the exact place of the other.

One day the conversation turned on unequal marriages. Society round Oakhurst was much exercised at this time because of the choice which had been made by a certain young Mr. Meade, the heir to a fine estate and the future head of an influential family. He had fallen in love with, and married, an innkeeper's daughter—a good girl enough, pretty, well-mannered, well-educated and of irreproachable conduct; but without the soft fringe of social velvet—without even a tag of inherited purple to glorify her fine and cleanly homespun. He himself was simply a boor—an example of atavism and recurrence to the original type; as we find at times in old families where the sons have been suffered to run wild about the village, and to make their prime friends of ratcatchers and game-keepers. He spoke with a strong provincial accent; haunted public-houses; liked a game at skittles in the back-alley better than billiards in his father's house;



was familiar with barmaids and awkward with ladies; read nothing save a sporting newspaper, which he had to spell like a schoolboy; could do little more than write his name; and he kept his betting-book by an arithmetic of his own composing. For all that he was born into the inheritance of the purple, and he was the son of a county family. Woman for man, Daisy Cross was immeasurably superior to Frank Meade in everything which makes the worth of a human being. Still it was a *mésalliance*, according to the canons of caste, and it had excited a great deal of uncomfortable feeling in the neighbourhood.

Mrs. Barrington was never bitter. That was not her way. Nevertheless, gentle as she was in manner, she was inflexible in matter, and she held her views with the firmness proper to those whose views represent to them principles, and whose principles are founded on what they believe to be divine command and law. She would have been false to her own idea of right had she slackened in faithful testimony and uncompromising condemnation. And such a marriage as this of Frank Meade's, together with all the new order of thought—all the tendencies of modern society—was to her iniquitous, revolutionary, and to be fought against as Christian fought against Apollyon.

"I think it infinitely shocking!" she said. "The Meades are an old family, settled in the county for the last three hundred years, and it is simply impious for the eldest son to make such a marriage. How can he hold his proper place in society with an innkeeper's daughter for his wife? What kind of influence can he have? And think of the example! It is appalling to see the way in which the world is going. We are

rushing headlong to the destruction of everything that is good and noble."

"It is certainly a great pity," said St. Claire; "still, Mrs. Frank Meade is in herself quite unexceptionable. I hear her very well spoken of everywhere, and I remember to have seen her once when I was called in consultation to a case in her father's house."

"Her father's house—the 'Marshal Blucher'!" laughed Theodosia, shrilly, tossing her small vivacious head.

"Still, dear Theo, an inn is a house, is it not?" put in Monica, with a soft smile.

"But we do not speak of an innkeeper's daughter living in her father's house like a lady," repeated Theo.

"No?" said Dr. St. Claire quite tranquilly. "I will amend the record, if I am wrong. In any case she struck me as very well-bred, and she is certainly pretty."

"Were you Frank Meade's rival?" asked Theodosia audaciously. "You speak as warmly as if you had had pretensions in the same direction yourself."

By nature Armine St. Claire was a woman-worshipper, and constitutionally disinclined to cross swords with the sex. He could bear a great deal of impertinence from a pretty woman and feel no resentment; but this thrust touched him to the quick. The blood rushed into his face and his eyes grew dark and angry. His lip curled with sudden contempt and his voice trembled in spite of himself.

"No;" he said with infinite pride, infinite disdain, such as they had never seen in him before, nor supposed him capable of feeling; "because I say that

Miss Cross is a nice girl for her station, and pretty, and well-educated, that does not make me Mr. Frank Meade's rival. The favours of an innkeeper's daughter are scarcely in my line, Mrs. Barrington!"

"I did not mean to offend you," laughed Theodosia, delighted with her power of rousing and exciting. "But I must say it looked like it."

"You have no right to say so," said Armine warmly.

She shrugged her neat round shoulders and again tossed her head. But she looked into his face with a smile and an expression in her eyes which he was not quick-witted enough to read. She thought he had laid an emphasis on the word *you*, and that he meant to reproach her for her cruelty in wilfully mistranslating him. He meant nothing of the kind. But he had the benefit of the hallucination—which was something.

"Still, being a nice girl for an innkeeper's daughter does not make her fit to be the wife of a country gentleman," said Mrs. Barrington, a little astonished by this sudden outburst of indignation from the young doctor to her son's wife.

"No;" said Dr. St. Claire; "not if put in an abstract form. But Mr. Meade is not equal to his position, and his wife is superior to hers; so they meet."

"And if he is not equal to his position, all the more reason that he should have married some one who could have raised him and kept him out of low company," returned Mrs. Barrington. "We have not only the individual to think of—we have the family and the social position. All these unequal marriages are bad," she went on rather warmly. "People should

keep in their own sphere. No good can come of this confusion of classes."

"But I think Dr. St. Claire is right—sometimes we might make an exception, where the person is very nice indeed, very superior," said Theodosia, looking full into Armine's face.

She knew that she was very naughty to give this young Lovelace such a broad hint; but no harm could come of it. Anthony was not going to die, and however much in love with her he might be, she did not suppose the handsome young doctor would presume to ask her to run off with him. It was all nothing—just a little excitement in this dull monotonous life of Oakhurst where she had none of the fun of danger and none of the pleasure of pain.

St. Claire turned his eyes in answer on her. This time they flashed, not with anger, but with gratitude that looked like love. She was half-frightened by that look, and wished she had been a little less incautious—a little more sparing. But the mischief was done now—and how handsome he looked when he was roused!

"It is sometimes a little difficult to define social station," he said, that wonderful light still burning in his eyes. "Money makes one test, birth another; but birth without money—where would you place that?"

"Always as a gentleman of course," said dear Mrs. Barrington in colloquial syntax.

The blood again rushed into his face. How sensitive he was to-day!

"You think so," he said quickly, with a rapid glance at Monica. "So do I."

"Of course supposing a good education, refinement

of feeling, and nice manners—else not,” said Mrs. Barrington, receding from her first position and modifying the breadth of her verdict, as she remembered the watchmaker who might have been the Dauphin; that Welsh blacksmith who claimed as his ancestor the bluff King Hal whose portraits he so marvellously resembled; as well as other undoubted descendants of bygone fallen greatness. “And then again,” she added, doubt deepening with reflection; “birth without money or position is difficult to imagine. For why is it poor? There must have been some fault somewhere; and a long line of ancestry ending in dishonour is more shameful than natural obscurity.”

“There may be misfortune,” he said. “Misfortune is not dishonour.”

“No, certainly not,” responded Theodosia briskly. “Misfortune is interesting.”

Mrs. Barrington shook her head.

“I do not believe much in unmerited misfortunes,” she said. “Conduct is fate; and for misfortune we ought for the most part to read fault.”

“Always? without exception?” Armine asked in an earnest kind of way, somewhat as if he were holding his breath.

“Mamma! how hard you are!” said Theodosia, still in her character of the sweet seductive temptress—the high-born lady receiving from her inferior the homage she would not refuse and the love she could not return.

“There is no rule without an exception,” said Mrs. Barrington gently. “Of course there may have been afflictions which have reduced a fine estate and made

the family beggars; but it is a difficult state of things to imagine without fault and with prudence."

"And you, Miss Barrington?" asked Dr. St. Claire, abruptly turning to Monica, who all this time had been sitting with downcast eyes as if studying to the minutest line a wood-work pattern which Armine had brought her. "Do you think that misfortune necessarily presupposes fault and is worthy of only blame?"

"I think with my mother:—In general, but not always, conduct is fate," she answered rather slowly, looking at her mother, not at Armine.

It was a safe answer. There could not have been one safer, less explicit, or more generalized.

"And in those exceptional cases where a man of good birth and education has been made poor by no fault of his own—forced into a lower social position than was his by inheritance—in those cases you would allow that he was still a gentleman, emphatically and thoroughly, and the equal of those among whom he was born?"

"Certainly," said Monica, and as she said this she looked into his face.

"But even if he has not been to blame himself, his people must have been in fault," said Mrs. Barrington, still more and more cautious as the talk seemed to slip somewhat from her guidance. "We must always take this into consideration;—it is in the blood, and that is as bad as if in the individual."

"The father may have been unfortunate without blame," said Armine.

Mrs. Barrington smiled with a sigh.

"Of course that is possible," she said. "But in any case we have to bear our burdens. When the

fathers eat sour grapes the children's teeth are set on edge. It is by the Divine decree, and we cannot escape it. Every action bears its consequences; every seed has its fruit."

"Then you would exile from your society such a one?" he asked.

He had never pushed an argument so far before. In general he was careful to allow the dear lady, whose favour he had set himself to win as the first step towards that greater gain of the daughter's—the lady with whom he was feeling his way so patiently—in general he was careful to allow her all the honours of victory without the fatigue of the struggle. She might state her opinion in the broadest and loosest way imaginable, and he never pushed her to logical conclusions nor to those closer definitions which women so mortally dislike. She might lay down the law as hard and fast as so many paving-stones, and he never objected to upheaval here, to crookedness there. But to-day he was quite different from his usual self. He felt the talk to be so vital to his future that he must run the risk of wearying and annoying in order to clear the ground.

"He could expect nothing else than to be excluded if he had sunk into another sphere," said Mrs. Barrington.

"Never to be rehabilitated, so that he should take his rightful place?—make an alliance, form an attachment, say, among his former equals?"

Theodosia lowered her eyes and bit her lips.

"What a horribly imprudent young fellow he is!" she thought. "I shall have to snub him if he is so rash as this!"

Monica too lowered her eyes, but she grew pale, not crimson like her sister-in-law.

"That would depend on the condition to which he had been brought," said Mrs. Barrington, whose sight was dim and who saw nothing of these changeable cheeks. "I confess I could not quite reconcile myself to the idea of a man who had been a shopkeeper, say, even though he had been born a gentleman. And as for marriage—as I said about Frank Meade's, I think this ought to be essentially between equals in all things. It does not do for a woman to be able to look down on her husband in any particular. On the contrary, she ought to look up to him as her natural superior as well as her social equal. If there is to be any inequality, let it be on the side of his superiority, not hers. But the social line of each should be equal."

"And you, Miss Barrington?" St. Claire asked of Monica again, rashly tempting fate.

She looked at her mother, a sad, set, artificial smile about her mouth.

"You always hear my views from my mother. We think alike in all things," she said; but her voice was neither clear nor steady as she spoke, and her face was of almost death-like pallor.

"Forgive me. I have forgotten time in talk," said St. Claire, rising abruptly. "I am afraid I must have wearied you, Mrs. Barrington; but the conversation interested me. I apologize."

His voice too, like Monica's, was neither clear nor steady; his face matched hers in its deadly whiteness; and his lips quivered as he spoke.

"Oh no, I am not wearied," said Mrs. Barrington



kindly, holding out her hand. "Time does slip away so very quickly in conversation! And I do not think we have agreed in our views to-day quite so well as usual," she added with a smile, ignorant of the hidden meaning of this sad little interchange of words.

"I am sure it has been very interesting—and you talk so well, Dr. St. Claire," said Theodosia hardily, as she shook hands with him in her turn.

"Thank you," he said simply, and pressed her hand as he spoke. Praise spoken before Monica and her mother was very sweet to him.

Monica said nothing. She merely raised her eyes to his, to all appearance with undisturbed serenity. But perhaps a close observer would have seen behind their usual dreamy melancholy something that was more real than dreams, something that was more active than melancholy.

"Good-bye," she said in a cold voice; and Theodosia thought to herself: "What an icicle that Monica is! She is as wooden as if carved out of an old bit of park-paling! I should like to shake her!"

So that, what between wrong vision and no vision at all, the truth of things connected with Armine St. Claire was in a very disturbed and cloudy condition.

When he had gone, Mrs. Barrington said, with an accent of surprise rather than of displeasure:

"What a strange mood Dr. St. Claire was in to-day! I have never seen him so odd and uncomfortable."

"No," said Monica.

"Why? What fault do you find with him, mamma?" said Theodosia.

"He was so argumentative, my dear; so unlike his usual self. He is generally so respectful and pleasant, but to-day he was all pins and needles, and so extraordinarily pertinacious! I could not make him out at all."

"I thought him very pleasant," said Theodosia in italics. "I like to hear him argue; he speaks so well."

"It is scarcely his place, my dear, to argue with me," said Mrs. Barrington, with a gentle kind of pride infinitely impressive, and as characteristic as impressive.

Mrs. Anthony Barrington turned away her head and answered in the air by making a small grimace. It relieved her own feelings; Mrs. Barrington did not see it; and no one knew whether Monica caught the disrespect which it involved or no.

"His charm hitherto," continued the elder lady, "has been in his nice respectful ways, the quickness of his tact, and the very proper deference that he has shown me. I should be sorry to think that I had spoiled him by my indulgence—that I had taken him out of his proper sphere and turned his head by over-kindness."

"Yes," said Monica, to whom her mother looked for an answer; "it would be a pity."

She spoke with the same kind of weary dragging feeling that one has when plodding heavily over a ploughed field. It was an effort to speak at all; to assent to this theory of spheres and social distances was a pain almost unendurable.

"Perhaps something has happened—to a friend of his which has disturbed him," said Theodosia, pulling

down her lips. "Some—friend—may have loved above himself, and all that we have been speaking of may have struck home on that account."

"Perhaps; very likely there is something of the kind," said Mrs. Barrington. "That explains all, poor young man! He is evidently an affectionate kind of creature, and I imagine would be greatly distressed by any pain to one whom he loved."

"Yes," said Monica dreamily; and "Yes," said Theodosia demurely; adding to that inner self to whom she made her confidences: "What a goose mamma is! She can be made to believe anything. And she is as blind as ten thousand bats!"

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## CHAPTER VI.

## A STEP ONWARD.

A FEW evenings after this odd little talk on unequal marriages at the Dower House, young Mrs. Barrington proposed to her husband that they should give a dinner-party. They were the great dinner-givers in the neighbourhood, and anything served as an occasion for the display of the massive family plate, and the distribution of that rare old port about which men talked as lovingly as of their wives or horses. This, now proposed, was based on a week's visit, which an old school-fellow of Theodosia's, one Lucy Lester, Sir John Lester's daughter, was about to pay them; and as Theo said; "They must make it pleasant for her, poor girl;" they would have a dinner-party to begin with.

"Very well," said Anthony. "Be it so."

Like many heavy men, he was fond of receiving in his own house, where he was the chief personage, and where he did things handsomely and set the neighbourhood an example.

"When shall it be? and who is to come?" he asked after a moment's pause.

"Lucy comes on Thursday, so it must be Thursday," said Theodosia. "Let us make out the list. I should like fourteen; our table holds fourteen so comfortably, and it is a nice number. Your mother and sister, of course, will be asked, but mamma will not

come. So Monica will be here alone, and we must have Edward Formby as her cavalier. By-the-by, Anthony, when *is* that coming off?" she added with a pretty little petulant air. "When *are* they going to marry?"

Anthony's face grew dark. Every man has his sore place, and this was his. In the whole run of his life, nothing annoyed him so much as the inexplicable delay in this affair. And whose fault was it? That was the difficulty! Had he known whom to rate, he would not have been long before setting about his task; but it was just the vagueness of everything which made the discomfort.

"Why do you ask me, Theo?" he answered irritably. "How should I know? They know their own affairs best. How the deuce can I tell more than yourself?"

"Now don't be such a dear old Bear!" said Theo, who saw that she had made a false start by setting her husband's teeth on edge. She had her own reasons for wishing to keep him in good humour, and she had done the very thing to put him wrong. "I will not have little wifey spoken to like that—such a cross old Bear as it is!" she added, leaving her place and going over to her husband on whose strong knee she perched herself, while she ran her dainty little jewelled fingers through his close-cropped stubbly hair and smoothed his shaggy overhanging eyebrows.

"Was I cross?" said Anthony, his stolid face brightening into a smile. What a fascinating little witch it was! No man in the kingdom had such a charming little wife as he—no man! "I did not mean to be a bear, Theo," he added amiably.

"Then say 'I'se sorry,'" said Theodosia, putting his broad hands together in an attitude of supplication.

"You little goose!" he laughed.

"Say 'I'se sorry,' else I will get off his knee and go into a corner and cry," she persisted.

"No; you shall not do that; so here goes;—'I'se sorry,'" said Anthony, smooth as satin and soft as down.

"Good boy! Now I'll give him a butterfly kiss," returned Theodosia, fluttering her long eyelashes rapidly over his cheek.

"I would rather have one from your lips, my pet," he said tenderly.

She kissed him prettily. She never refused her caresses when she had anything to gain; and she had something to gain now.

"Now then," she said, when she had kissed him; "that's done, so we'll go on with our dinner!"

She went on with the tale of names and pairings; and after due selection and rejection got up to thirteen without much difficulty. But here she seemed to have come to the end of her resources. Some imp seemed to have taken possession of that fourteenth place and to have resolved that no living man should oust him. No one whom her husband proposed would she accept. She had strong and unanswerable reasons against each and all, but a fourteenth of course they must have; and it must be a gentleman to match the odd lady on the list. Whom could they ask? Nor this nor that would do. It was really very tiresome; whom could they have?

"I tell you what it is, Anthony," at last said Theodosia, her face lightening as if a sudden thought,

touching on inspiration, had struck her. "We will have Dr. St. Claire."

"That apothecary fellow?" said Anthony Barrington in frank amazement. "My dear Theo, have you taken leave of your senses? Are you mad?"

"Not that I know of!" she laughed. "What are the symptoms? Should I want to bite my boo'ful old Bear? I would rather pat his dear old face instead," she said, suiting the action to the word, and laying her soft little hands caressingly on his cheeks. "No, I hope I am not mad," she went on to say, making a distractingly pretty face; "for then I should have to go into a horrid lunatic asylum—poor little me! Poor old Bear too! How would he get on without his little wifey! No sir, I am not mad, and we will have Dr. St. Claire as our fourteenth."

"Theo! child! how can you propose such an incongruity at a dinner given for Lucy Lester!" said Anthony, more and more amazed at this failure in the nice conduct of things of one whom he fondly hoped he had educated up to the right point.

"Why not?" she said, opening her eyes to their widest. "She will not fall in love with him, I suppose, and he makes a good appearance. He is far handsomer and better bred than that odious Frank Meade who has disgraced himself so much. And yet we shall be obliged to have him and his barmaid wife, as the county has agreed to receive them. Dr. St. Claire is miles better than they!" she added petulantly, as if in praising him she was condemning the other—not praising for positive condemnation but for comparative blame.

"But Frank Meade is the son of a county family," began Anthony remonstratingly.

She stopped his mouth with a flyaway kiss.

"Dear old bearikins need say no more," she said. "Little wifey has made up her mind, and there's an end of it. Kiss her then, and say he is a good old bear, and she will pour him out another glass of wine."

"Theo! you really are too childish, my darling," he said.

But he smiled as he spoke, and in another moment had said the prescribed formula and received his reward.

So this was the way in which young Mrs. Barington managed her heavy-visaged husband and got her will of him—twisted him round her little finger, as people said. And this was how it came about that Dr. St. Claire was asked to a dinner at the Manor, given to "nice people," in honour of a baronet's daughter. It was the longest social stride he had yet made; would it bring him any nearer to his goal?

The day of Lucy Lester's arrival, and consequent dinner-party at the Manor, came in its course; and the guests in ordinary holiday humour assembled as they were bidden. It was rather provoking perhaps that Dr. St. Claire was just in the same kind of holiday humour as were these others, and showed no special consciousness of the honour that had been done to him. He came in like anyone else, only rather handsomer, rather more graceful, and undeniably more distinguished in appearance than the rest, but neither more radiant nor more humble; really as if he were quite accustomed to be petted by pretty married women to whom he had made love by his eyes, and



to be received as an equal in the stiff drawing-rooms of Brahminical county families.

Theodosia did not know whether to like him better for his quiet audacity, or to feel disappointed by his ingratitude and affronted by his coolness. She wondered what it meant. Was it to show her that he was to be trusted for delicacy and discretion? Did he wish her to understand that he was used to this kind of thing, and master of the situation through long apprenticeship? She had expected him to make a secret sign of some sort—to say or do something to show that he understood and appreciated her grace. And here he was, as calm and unmoved as if he had been asked to high tea at Flora Farley's, or a romping game at loo at Madge Langhorne's! This was all her reward for the trouble she had taken to get him here at all—coaxing that cross old Anthony of hers into a good humour, and making her eyelids ache with her butterfly kisses! What did he mean by it? There was something underneath that quiet assumption of equality which she could not quite make out; what was it?

Anthony's wife asked herself these questions in vain. She generally did ask herself questions in vain. Her mind was always at work about some perfectly useless problem, busying itself in surmises and suspicions as baseless as so many castles in the clouds—her thoughts were for ever twirling and fluttering like the filmy fins of the hippocampus, but doing no good to herself or to others—carrying her no higher in moral perception, no farther in intellectual discernment. Hers was of the humming-bird order of intelligence—doubtless fulfilling some useful purpose in the world of man and mind—but what that purpose was no

expert had yet been found keen enough to determine.

As for Anthony, to whom the well-bred young doctor was a creature of a lower race, secretly resenting his being here at all, he was as much annoyed by the fellow's quiet assumption of equality as he would have been by any show of any conscious difference. Whether the lamb drinks at the source or the outfall it is the same to the wolf. And on this special occasion Anthony was the wolf and Armine St. Claire was the lamb.

The disposition of her guests at the table had been an anxious study to Theodosia. She would have liked to have given St. Claire the second place of honour next herself, but she dared not put him too much *en évidence*, nor show him too great attention. She had the craft as well as the daring of her kind, and knew both how to creep in ambush and how to carry by assault. So she placed the handsome young doctor the third from her—near enough to be included in her own immediate circle, but not unduly exalted in the eyes of the watching world. He was thus immediately opposite Edward Formby and Monica Barrington.

Next to giving him Monica for his own share, Theodosia could not have done better for Armine than she had done; and for an instant he was weak enough to ask himself the question—as futile as Theodosia's—What did she mean by it? Was it by accident or design? Was it ignorance of his feelings or kindly interest in his desires? Any way, failing the supreme delight of being by Miss Barrington's side, this was the best place at the table for him, and he was more

grateful to his feather-headed little hostess than she would have been glad to have known.

He made as much use of his opportunity for observation as he dared—remembering always the supreme need of careful reserve. He, like all the world, had heard of this understanding, which was not an engagement—of the marriage which everyone had arranged save the principals themselves. Somehow he did not quite believe in it. He would have been hard put to it to have said why, but he did not believe that Monica was in love with, or engaged to, her assigned husband. Still, as this was the first time that he had met them so closely set together, he wanted to see for himself how things stood—so far as he could judge by looks and manners—and whether all hope for himself was cut off by this barrier as well as by some others. Wherefore he watched the two, carefully if prudently—so prudently that Theodosia, who was watching him, did not catch his pre-occupation.

As for Monica herself, well-schooled as she was in keeping the secret of her thoughts so that no one should discover them, she seemed to take no more interest in one person than in another. She talked to Edward Formby in the limp, nerveless, half-dreamy way of a well-bred girl who is both bored and patient; but she did not try to shuffle him off on to any other hands than her own; nor to draw anyone else into the languid stream of their tepid talk; nor to appear more alert and interested than she really was. She did not look across the table at St. Claire, of whose stealthily watching eyes she was keenly conscious; nor did she look much at Edward, nor spread herself abroad in any way. She was mainly interested in her bread-

crumbs and the flowers in the low glass troughs; and for the rest, she accepted her position with that meek acquiescence in fate and the inevitable, which is so pathetic in certain women.

There was none of the impatience of regret in her, none of the strife of struggle. She knew how her life was ordered for her by circumstances and what was expected of her by her friends; and she accepted her lot as submissively as if she had been a daughter in the Middle Ages destined by her father to a nunnery, or a sister betrothed by her brothers to the baron while secretly in love with the squire. It was to no good that she did not wish to go into the nunnery—that she loved the squire and loathed the baron. Circumstance was too strong for her, and she had nothing for it but to submit. As now, when, conscious of what was expected of her, she must keep herself in hand and conquer her secret desires without letting the world know that she had had any to conquer at all. Some rebellions must be met by interdict; some victories must be celebrated in silence; and this was one of them. Wherefore Monica sat peaceably by the side of Edward Formby, the man designated by the fitness of things to be her husband; talking without interest on matters without vitality; chiefly occupied in crumbling her bread into dust which she piled into heaps with her little finger; while Armine St. Claire sat immediately opposite, making talk for the florid matron whom he had taken down, and longing for one look, only one, from the lady of his love, in vain.

Once and only once she looked directly at him. This was when Theodosia said in her sharp audacious way:

"I hear that you are going to leave Oakhurst, Dr. St. Claire. Is it true?"

She had not heard this; but she wanted to say something that should startle him and turn his whole attention on herself. He was almost too conscientiously attentive to that florid matron assigned to him. He flushed deeply and laughed lightly.

"True? no indeed!—not that I know of!" he said.

"Oh, but I heard it!" she persisted in that obstinate way of silly people who think if they can say, "I heard it," "I was told so," they have sufficiently established their case and refuted your disclaimer. "Some one told me—I forget now who it was. It was a lady, but I quite forget who. And she said that you told her you were going to leave because you did not find the place or people sufficiently interesting," she went on, her audacity of invention increasing with her fluency. "It was not a very flattering compliment to poor little us," she continued with a little grimace. "But I dare say you are right, and that we are a stupid set. I sometimes think so myself."

"Do you?" answered Dr. St. Claire, again laughing lightly. "I do not agree with you, Mrs. Barrington. On the contrary, I think the society at Oakhurst very interesting indeed—some members of it especially so—and I have not the smallest intention of leaving."

He looked at her while he spoke, and his misleading eyes lured her on the same pathless way as before. No man, she thought, could look like that who did not feel! But what an imprudent young fellow he was! She wished now that she had left the still lake undisturbed, and had not flung into the waters that stone which might create a stronger ripple than

she desired. Really those eyes of his were scarcely proper! As Jane Wintergreen had said in her sharp way:—They suggested the Divorce Court; and they did.

Then it was that, while Dr. St. Claire was looking at Theodosia and Theodosia was looking at him, Monica raised her dark-grey dreamy orbs and glanced across the table at the man who loved her, and whose love she knew. She just glanced at him, no more, when he said that he found some members of the Oakhurst society specially interesting and that he did not intend to leave. But he, looking at her sister-in-law—that laughing, flushed, audacious and vivacious little sinner who liked nothing so well as to play with edged tools and to scatter wildfire all abroad—he did not see that one swift rapid look for which all through the dinner he had been longing in vain. When he brought back his eyes from Theodosia by way of Monica and his own partner, Monica's were once more fixed on Edward Formby's shirt-front, and she was saying in her sweet, limp, patient way, as one fulfilling a duty which must be performed at all cost:

“Have you any favourite horses now, Edward? Are you going to win the Derby?”

When the dinner was over and the “gentlemen had joined the ladies,” the open order of the drawing-room allowed of new combinations; and Armine took advantage of the greater liberty of association permitted, to go up to Monica as she sat by a small table set in the corner of the room, turning over that everlasting resource of ennui, a book of photographs which she had seen at the least twenty times from end to end. He drew a low chair near her and sat down,

beginning his conversation by the safe generalities of inquiring, How was her mother? and How the maid seemed to be going on? She was getting better by now, but she was still in his hands and legitimately inquired of.

"Mother is pretty well and Grace is getting on well," said Monica, doing her best to be as quiet and limp with Armine St. Claire as she had been with Edward Formby. But in spite of herself, she felt as if she had suddenly received some accession of strength; as if her blood had been warmed by wine; as if her back-bone had become stiffened, her muscles more elastic, her whole being, moral and physical, enlivened, braced, invigorated. The grey clouds of her normal atmosphere lifted themselves in one swift breath of glory, and the sunshine gilded the whole earth in which she lived with beauty and radiance. There was nothing either novel or interesting in Dr. St. Claire's question, but the tones of his voice roused her as if this inquiry after her mother's health and the servant's condition had opened vistas of illimitable pleasantness across the dead dullness of her ordinary life. Try as she would she could not retain her usual passive and uninterested bearing. Her pale lips smiled with frank delight and gracious tenderness, and the soft sweet dreamy eyes, which raised themselves as if suddenly waking out of sleep, had in them a certain something which Edward Formby had never seen and which no man save St. Claire had ever called forth. It was only for a moment that she looked, in this strangely responsive and awakened way, into the face bending forward on a lower level than her own; only for a moment that she smiled as we do smile when we

have attained our desire and the circle of our joy is complete. But that short instant was gladness enough for St. Claire, living on low diet as he was, uncertain of everything—from her heart to his chances, from her circumstances to his own powers.

“And how gets on the work?” he said after a short pause. He had to make conversation only of commonplaces, while his whole being was strung with passion, his whole heart throbbing with emotion. “Have the little boy and girl completed their courtship and joined hands among the flowers?”

This was in allusion to the subject of a wood-work frame, which he himself had designed for Monica—a quaint little couple of Dresden china figures done in cherry-wood for *pâte tendre*.

“Not quite,” she said with another smile, and something almost like a faint blush on her colourless face. “The boy is done, but the little maiden is still only in the sketch. She is not carved into individuality.”

“She takes longer to create than he,” said St. Claire with affected carelessness. “This too is human nature.”

“He is simpler and stands freer,” said Monica. “She is more entangled in the flowers.”

“How pleasant it is to work at these fanciful things!” said St. Claire. “When the realities of life go wrong what a relief it is to be able to lose one’s own identity, as it were, in pretty little graceful pictures which amuse, or in deeper poems which absorb! What a joy it is to turn to a world where the sun always shines—where the flowers never fade and the birds ever sing—where life is always young, beauty



unspoiled, and love always blessed! Do you not feel this, Miss Barrington? I know you do."

She looked at him as she had looked once before—the secret of her soul gathered like summer lightning in her eyes.

"Yes," she said fervently; then dropping her lids she added with a faint sigh: "In one's own world one is at least free and happy."

"And loved and loving," said St. Claire in a low voice.

She did not answer, but somewhat nervously turned over the leaves of that everlasting book of photographs, and made believe to find contentment in a little person in a large crinoline, her head turned back over her shoulder, her foot on a footstool, her hand on the back of a chair, the other holding a fan with languid grace, according to the favourite pose and accessories of a fashionable artist some five-and-twenty years ago.

"In one's own world at least one is above circumstance," he continued.

"Yes," she answered; "in one's own world only."

"And the doctrine that will is power?" he asked.

"It is a good phrase for that kind of vague excitement which helps young people," said Monica, as staidly as if she had been sixty years old; "but will is not always power," she added with a slight negative movement of her head and hand; "and circumstances do and must master us."

"No; not if we will that they shall not," he persisted.

"But when they represent duty?" asked Monica not looking up. "Then you will allow they are imperative."

"Not above love," was the rash reply made in so low a voice that the very softness of the sentence attracted more attention than if it had been spoken freely and in an ordinary tone.

Three pairs of eyes were at this moment turned on these two as they sat together in the corner of the room, fencing with the subject that lay between them as a sleeping child which they must not waken and could not leave. Edward Formby, who liked Monica very well indeed—quite sincerely and unaffectedly, as a man likes a sweet and placid sister—though he had not the least objection to see her absorbed by the handsome doctor, was yet frankly surprised by the roused interest of her face. He himself had never called forth such vitality of feeling, such latent power of enthusiasm; and for a moment he felt somehow as if he had lost the chill companion of his future—the nunlike sister of his affections—and had found her again as the passionate priestess of an unknown cult, the torchbearer of a new light. He was at the other end of the room, talking to Lucy Lester to whom he had just been presented; but he was not so fascinated by his pretty companion as not to see what was going on elsewhere; and the revelation given by Monica's face—which however he did not for an instant connect with St. Claire—startled him almost painfully. Theodosia too was watching them, half in displeasure half in amazement, thinking: What could those two be talking about? and Why was Monica all at once so much interested and excited? Such a stick as she was in general, why should she have brightened up into

vivacity now? Was St. Claire looking into her eyes as he had looked into her own? and were two chords vibrating to the same delusive breath?

But when Anthony, looking about him as became the giver of the feast and the master of the house, spied out the one obnoxious guest in familiar converse with his sister, and that sister more animated, more vivacious, more alert than was her wont, then the pleasant little drama came to an end, the lights were quenched, the music was hushed, and a rude hand tore down the graceful draperies which had clothed the stern realities of life with momentary beauty and illusion. Striding across the room he rather roughly told Monica that she ought to go and talk to Lucy Lester; she had not spoken to her yet, he said with a sullen frown on his heavy face; and she was the guest of the evening and Theodosia's old friend.

"Very well, dear," said Monica meekly. "I will go."

She looked with a swift and yet pathetic look at St. Claire; making a slight inclination with her head as she left him to follow her brother. The wine had gone out of her veins, and she was once more limp and nerveless as she sat down by pretty Lucy and the man whom the fitness of things had designated as her own husband when the times were ripe, and talked in her 'sweet dreamy way on matters wherein she felt no kind of interest and of which her companions had no kind of knowledge.

Soon after this the carriage came for Miss Barrington, and the party dissolved as if by magic. St. Claire was the first to go after Monica, and all the rest filed out as if a general order had been given for dispersion, leaving the Anthony Barringtons alone

with Miss Lester. When she went to her own room, which she did almost immediately, then they were alone with each other.

Theo was a little cross to-night. Somehow things had not gone quite as she had expected; and she was uncomfortable in consequence. She could not say what had gone wrong; but she had the bitter flavour of disappointment in her mouth, and she was both peevish and petulant. Anthony was cross too; but his little wife did not perch herself on his strong knees, nor join his broad hands together by the palms, nor call him her dear old bear, nor fatigue her eyelids by giving him a butterfly kiss to bring him back to good humour. She did none of these things. On the contrary, she yawned in his face when he spoke to her, and said irritably: "Don't Anthony be so silly! I don't like it!" when he would have put his arm round her waist—as the process by which he thought to get rid of some of his superabundant bile.

Nothing was said that could be called a quarrel, but an acrid kind of small sparring went on between them, about irrelevant trifles for which neither cared a straw; while the name of the obnoxious young man, who was the secret sore on either side, was not mentioned in their little tourney. This is always the way. Straight-hitting is the exception and side-cuts are the rule. Once only did Anthony make a direct thrust when he said with a sneer:

"Well, Theo, I hope you are satisfied, now that you have had your apothecary friend to the house like an equal. You really must put some curb on your fancies, Theo! I indulge you too much, and make myself ridiculous as well as you."

"I do not see anything ridiculous in having Dr. St. Claire to dinner," said Theodosia perty. "He is a very pleasant, handsome, well-bred young man—worth twenty of your dull Edward Formbys and your vulgar Frank Meades! And if I choose I shall ask him again."

"Theo!" said Anthony in a warning voice.

"Well?—and what after Theo?" she retorted.

"That is not the tone to take with me, Theodosia," said Anthony slowly, with grave severity and deep displeasure.

"It is the tone I mean to take when I like," replied Theodosia, looking up into his face with a rebellious look on her own.

And Anthony felt as men do when they are defied by their wives—helpless, tongue-tied, and hand-fast.

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## CHAPTER VII.

## UNDERSTOOD.

A FEW days after this St. Claire went up to the Dower House to pay his farewell professional visit. He had pulled the servant through her perilous attack, and now he must leave her to the beneficent care of nature and Mrs. Barrington. His heart was very heavy as he thought that this was the last time he should have the privilege of going to the house at his own hour—the last time he should be able to feel his way, and if possible make it, with Mrs. Barrington, and through her with Monica.

It was a well-nigh hopeless task altogether; but who gives up a task like this while hope has a spark of life remaining? What is a man's love worth if it cannot face obstacles? and what is his manhood worth if it cannot overcome them? And yet—is there any use in struggling with the unconquerable? in defying the inevitable? Even Thor could not overthrow Old Age nor uproot the foundations of the earth; and how then should he, St. Claire, conquer those adverse social forces, arrayed against him, which were as formidable as they were potent? Truly the stars in their courses had, as he said, fought against him all through; and none were on his side, no, not one! His profession; his want of fortune; his father's tragic end; Monica's social station; the quiet devotion and self-suppression

of her character; her duties to her mother, to her family, to society; her assignment to Edward Formby—all were against him. And to oppose this hostile phalanx he had only his youth, his good looks, his love, himself! It was an unequal struggle. Still, he would strive to the end; and at least he would not have to reproach himself for faint-heartedness.

The stars, however, were doubly adverse to-day. It had been Monica's invariable habit to be at home with her mother at that five o'clock tea to which he had been such a constant guest of late. But to-day she was absent—by accident or design? He had not seen her since the dinner-party. Had too much been said and shown then for her to dare to trust herself again? or was it her sign to him that he had gone beyond his tether, and that she wished him to understand his place? Whatever the cause, here was the result; she was absent;—and only Mrs. Barrington sat by the little oval table covered with that quaintly-worked cloth which was now associated in his mind with the one charm of his existence—with the hope and the love, the sorrow, despair and delight of his life. How he knew every line and colour of that strange border with its conventionalised flowers, its impossible dragons, its peacocks which were no more like the real thing than if they had been yew-trees clipped in outline! How it was the visible symbolism of the ideal land where he and Monica met and wandered through those unreal alleys, and sat hand in hand beneath those shadowy trees! He quite surprised Mrs. Barrington by the oddly intent way in which he, a man, looked at that embroidered border.

“He looks as if he wanted to take the pattern,”

she said to herself; then aloud, an elder's impatience with unexplained oddity getting the better of her good-breeding, she asked St. Claire, What he was studying so deeply in that border? and, Surely he did not do that kind of work himself?

"No," he answered, laughing to hide his embarrassment; "I was only thinking how these mythic dragons and heraldic monsters ever took shape in the human mind—whether they were survivals in the historic memory of some late living pterodactyl or ichthyosaurus, or simply childish combinations, having no foundation in fact."

"Oh, who can tell!" said Mrs. Barrington with the faintest accent of displeasure in her voice.

Speculations of this kind were hateful to her—she thought them so closely trenching on impiety!

"No, indeed, no one can," said St. Claire, recovering his lost ground with his usual quickness. "As you say, Mrs. Barrington, speculations of this kind are mere waste of time."

She smiled pleasantly.

"Yes," she answered. "And you are not one of those unpractical creatures who waste this most valuable possession of all we have, in dreams and theories which are more fanciful and audacious than useful or reverent."

"I hope not," said the young doctor, content to forswear himself if only Monica's mother would be gracious to him.

He gained his desire. Mrs. Barrington was gracious; and had he been in the modest and proper frame of mind for which she gave him credit, he would have been perfectly satisfied with things as they were. For



the dear old lady took pains to show how frankly grateful she was for the care he had taken of her servant, and how frankly regretful that this was his last visit.

"I shall quite miss you at my tea-table," she said in her sweet way. "But you must come to see me sometimes. You know where to find me, and I shall be always glad to see you."

He looked at her eagerly when she said this. With the illimitable folly of a lover he speculated on the chance of her words meaning more than they said—of the *I* including Monica. But he saw no trace of undercurrent of feeling or hidden meaning on her smooth, benevolent face—in the gentle condescension of her kindly manner. She meant only what she said—that she would be glad to help to keep him in virtuous paths by her mild tea and thin' bread and butter; glad to minister to his soul's health, and to the maintenance of his graceful manners, by associating him with herself for half an hour at a time—sometimes but not too often; glad to put up the social buckler of her patronage between him and that low company to which she feared he might else be destined. She wished him to understand that she had approved of his conduct while he had been in her temporary service, and that she was philanthropically pleased to reward him. That was all. There was no thought of Monica in the whole matter, and he was a fool and a madman for his pains!

He could stay no longer. He had exhausted all his pretexts and had thrashed out to the last fibre all his available subjects of talk. If he would not lay himself open to suspicion, he must now take his leave

without being able to say good-bye to Monica—without being able to look into her face and see where those few seemingly unimportant, but in reality significant, words had left her. His heart was heavy; his beautiful eyes, of which even dear old Mrs. Barrington felt the subtle charm, were sorrowful and pathetic as he stood up and thanked the lady for all her courtesy, her goodness, her kindness. She thanked him in return for his attention and care; and, as they shook hands together, a pleasant little interchange of friendly words passed between them—she repeating her hospitable invitation; he, assuring her that he would profit by it; and both professing mutual trust, goodwill, respect, and so much affection as the social abyss which separated them allowed or rendered possible.

Then he finally took his leave; bowed again as he was at the door; and so passed out into the hall, and from the hall down the broad flight of steps leading from the portico to the terrace—his last visit to the Dower House paid and ended.

He stood for a moment looking at what was before him. What an interesting place it was, with its quaint rows of clipped yew-trees, its old-fashioned close-set hedges, and its long straight terraces—terrace on terrace—leading by steps down to the fountain and the fish-pond below! The peacocks sunning themselves in the broad walk and screaming from the lower branches of the formal yew-trees; the pigeons fluttering about the gabled roof, and cooing to each other, softly, unceasingly, with the pathetic yearning, the very remonstrance of love in their tones; the big brown wolf-hound lying tranquilly before the house-door, knowing whom to

trust and when to guard; the beds of fragrant flowers—sweet long lines of Mary-lilies and coloured foam of odorous sweet-pea—aromatic clove-pinks and subtle-scented mignonnette set about the feet of damask roses and starry jasmine; the lazy summer sunshine lying over all, languid rather than fervid and more soothing than exciting—all added to the charm of this most delightful place, this bit of old-world beauty standing in the midst of the garish new, like a noble pearl, slightly discoloured by age, set in the midst of Palais Royal jewellery.

And the ladies themselves, with their suggestion of dried rose-leaves and odoriferous gums—they were in keeping with the house; out of the run of daily life as we have it now; something purer and more lovely, more modest and more gentle; something apart and sacred. And Monica, that crown of gracious womanhood, that flower of sweet unsullied maidenhood! Ah, how pure and beautiful she was! How well he understood now all that poets had ever written of their Beautiful Ladies, their Madonnas, their Lauras, their Beatrices, their Leonoras, their Marias! How well he knew the empire that lies in a saintly woman's life—the majesty of her faith, the nobility of her thoughts, the grand dominion of her purity! Before he came to Oakhurst he thought he had mastered some of life's most sacred secrets and had touched the chords of some of its deepest melodies. Now he knew that he had known nothing, felt nothing; that his whole world had lain in the cold and colourless twilight of the early dawn before the sun had touched the mountain tops with glory, or struck its warmth down to the roots of the forest trees, or shed its radiance on the wayside

flowers. Neither of woman nor of man had he learned the deepest things; neither of life nor of death had he seen the truest meaning. His eyes had been blind, his mind obscured, until he came to where his Lady had awakened him with the living light of love. And now he knew all:—but most of all, he knew the infinite grandeur of woman, the infinite power of love, and the force of deathless sorrow.

All this was in his mind as an impression rather than as a conscious thought, while he stood for a moment on the terrace, facing the downward lines and noting the fountain sparkling in the sun as the closing point of all.

Suddenly Monica came into view. She turned the corner of the lowest avenue, and came up the steps leading from the fish-pond and the fountain to the house, through the garden and its quaint-cut alleys. She carried her hat in her hand, and her heavy hair, which had fallen a little loose from its fastenings, drooped on her shoulders in a waving mass of tender brown which the yellow sunlight turned to gold on the edges. That sunlight fell on her face and barred the folds of the white dress she wore with lines of shining light. Of some soft clinging stuff, this dress had about it certain bands and spaces of pale green, so that the girl might be likened to a lily with its green sheath still about the base of the petals, and the face of the angel of which it was the natural expression looking out on life from the chalice. All grace, all purity, all virginal delicacy of soul and body—full of a quiet and tender melancholy which was less sadness than self-suppression—resigned, devoted, humble—making that strange land of ardent dreams her own world apart,

and living in the dull monotony of cheerless fact for love's sake and duty—she was to St. Claire the very ideal of chastened maidenhood whose thoughts were brighter than her days and whose visions reached beyond experience. She was his saint, his love, his lady; and to live for her happiness or to die for her gain, would be equally his best attainment, should fate prove so far his friend as to grant him either the one or the other.

The shock of glad surprise on seeing her coming there in the sunlight so unexpectedly, after he had slain the hope of meeting her to-day and laid it in the grave of his despair, overcame all purely conventional considerations; and Armine ran hurriedly down the four flights of steps which were between them, to meet her as she ascended. By natural instinct, when he had met her he stood so that their positions were reversed. She was on the step higher than he, looking down on him and towards the fountain—he was on that lower than hers, looking up to her and the house.

"This is my last visit. I have to wish you good-bye," he said, speaking abruptly and with some difficulty.

Her gentle face was very pale, and as he said this it became even more pallid than before; but she kept it quite still and motionless, somewhat as if she were acting a part which demanded absolute immobility of feature. Her eyes were rather darker than usual, and they did not look into St. Claire's face but over his head, and on to the fountain sparkling in the sun.

"I am sorry," she said quietly.

Immediately after she repented that she had said only so much; for such a sudden flash of joy broke

over his face—such a passionate outburst of gratitude and delight seemed to stir his whole being—that she was both troubled and repentant.

For her path was clear; and since that dinner at the Manor she had realized her own danger as well as grieved over his mistake. Henceforth there must be no paltering with this present peril, no dallying with this seductive poison. Her duty was written in broad bold characters. She could not mistake them. And reading those letters as clearly as she did, but one course was open to her. That which might have blossomed into such a glorious flower of life and love and happiness must be nipped now while it was time and when only in the unacknowledged bud.

It was his last chance. Sooner or later he must tempt Providence and try conclusions with destiny; why not now as well as hereafter? He might not see her alone again for weeks—why not utilize what might prove the turning-point of his career? The servant was out of his hands, and he could not count on any future occasion for daily visits. He must stake his all on the hazard of the die now at once, and know his fate before leaving.

Quite suddenly, he said in the same abrupt way as before:

“I want to have that point cleared up, Miss Barrington—I want to have it thoroughly understood. Do you think all unequal marriages, in all circumstances whatsoever, absolutely inadmissible? Could you never be brought to make one on your own account?”

“I could never marry without my mother’s full permission,” she said, answering the second half of his question and not the first.

"But if your mother gave her consent, would you then?" he asked feverishly.

"I need not think of that—my mother never would," she answered, her voice a little lowered. "You heard what she said—and I know what she feels."

"And you could not be moved against her wishes?—not if you loved?"

He looked up at her, his whole soul on his face; his love pleading for him in eyes, in voice, in gesture, in all but direct word.

She turned her eyes from the fountain and looked down at him with sad and infinite tenderness; then she looked back to those shining falling waters which somehow represented to her the eternal impossibilities of her life.

"I would never allow myself to love so as to hurt my mother," she answered softly, yet without faltering. "I owe myself to her, and no one—no one—could induce me to pain her!"

"But the heart is not to be commanded by duty," he said. "We love independent of our will."

"We must control ourselves if our love wars with our duty," she answered. "We have reason, conscience, and self-restraint."

"And if you not only sadden your own life but break another's heart?" he asked.

"I must not break my mother's," she returned.

"And is this your real feeling? your own voluntary resolution, not forced on you by pressure from without?" he asked again.

"Yes, it is," she said in a low, clear voice. "My one great duty is to take care of my mother and make her happy."

"And your lover?—the man who loves you better than his own life?" he said, his words half strangled with emotion.

Again she brought her eyes back from the fountain and turned them down to the feverish, grieving, up-turned face below her.

"Hush!" she said, slightly raising her hand. "I have no lovers—no lovers anywhere—only friends. You will remember this," she added, bending a little nearer as she spoke, her own face full of sweetest pity—of an almost divine tenderness—so that all sorrow for herself seemed swept away in the infinite sympathy she felt for another's sorrow. "No man must ever confess to me or to others that he loves me, and I must not acknowledge even to myself that I love him. I have only friends—nothing nearer than friends," she repeated, a little dreamily and yet steadily.

"You have one lover faithful to the death!" said Armine with passion. "Come what may, I love you dearer than my life; and I shall always love you—always! No time, no change, not death itself, shall ever warp me from my allegiance to you—Monica. Ah! let me call you by your dear name once, it is only for this once! Monica, the world's soul to me—the meaning of life—the hope of heaven!"

She held out her hand, affecting not to hear him.

"I must go now," she said. "My mother is expecting me. Good-bye. Keep well—be happy."

"Happy!" he said bitterly. "I shall never be happy! How is it possible, when I have lost all I care for—all I have lived and hoped for! Happy!"

"Yes," she answered gently; "you will—you must



—for you are reasonable and good. You are good,” she repeated; “you will be happy. I know you will, because I wish it. Good-bye, and God bless you!”

She laid her hand in his. He carried it to his lips with that sad reverence of a love which is at once hopeless and intense. His eyes were wet, but hers were tearless and dry. The strain as well as the sorrow was on her; on him was only the sorrow. She must be strong both to deny and to bear; he had only to bear with what courage and manhood he possessed. The heaviest burden was on the woman, as it is so often!—when she must pain herself as well as the man who loves her and whom she loves, and refuse for conscience’ sake that which would make her life’s happiness to grant. Poor weak loving woman—how much may be forgiven her because of her love and the burden of her sorrows!

“Good-bye,” he said in a broken voice. “I understand you. God bless you! always, always, my one gracious Lady, the priceless treasure of my life! No one can prevent my loving you,” he went on to say passionately. “I may not show it, even to you, and I must not ask your love in return; but thoughts and hearts are free, and to the end of time you will be the one sacred and secretly beloved woman of my inner life—my star, my beloved!”

“Hush! hush!” she said, “you must not say these things! you must forget that you have said them. Remember! I have already forgotten,” she said simply and earnestly. “We understand each other—but all this is forbidden.”

“Ah! what have I lost!” he exclaimed in a kind of agony. “But at least your friendship remains to

me? your friendship is mine for ever, is it not?" he repeated as if he found in that repetition some strange comfort and anchorage.

"For ever," she answered solemnly. "For ever. My friendship?—yes, always; we will be always friends." She passed her hand over her forehead, and both stood for half a moment silent. Then she seemed as if she woke from a dream. "Now good-bye, once more," she said, looking at him steadily. "Nothing is changed between us, and we stand just where we did. You understand all this, do you not? Nothing is changed—never has been—and we are friends as we were in the beginning. Just the same—all the same as in the beginning. Good-bye," she repeated tenderly as she made a little movement with her hand—a movement that seemed to express both a benediction and a farewell—then turned away and went slowly up the steps towards the house, leaving St. Claire standing in the yellow summer sunshine, alone.

It was all over. He had made no way, and his doom of exile had been pronounced. For the first time he realized the full disabilities of his position and tasted the true bitterness of his social fall. He was only a country doctor, and Monica Barrington, a daughter of one of the county families, could never be his wife. His youthful theories about a man's individual worth, and the glorious application of science in the mitigation of human ills—where were they now? Standing there in the garden of the Dower House, a rejected suitor for the hand of the only woman he had ever loved, or as it seemed to him, ever could love—what good did they do him? what solace did they bring? All of which he was conscious was, that the

bright bubble of his hope had burst for ever, and that he must bear his anguish in the best way he could.

As for Monica, who could say what was in her heart as she went in to her mother, in the sweet and gracious way that was natural to her, dreamy yet loving, her perceptions not always fully aroused, but her heart ever responsive, her sense of duty ever active, her unselfishness never slackening.

"My dear," said her mother, "Dr. St. Claire has just been here for the last time. I am sorry you were not at home. I shall really quite miss his visits! He is a very painstaking and creditable young man, poor creature, and he has always behaved well here."

"I met him as I was coming home, and wished him good-bye," said Monica.

She spoke quite calmly; perhaps a little more under her breath than usual; but she had always a low voice and a soft intonation.

"That was right," said Mrs. Barrington, looking at her fondly.

The girl was standing so that the light fell full on her face and made every line and marking clear even to the mother's dimmer vision.

"My dear child, how pale you are!" she exclaimed. "Are you well, Monica? I have never seen you so pale!"

"Am I?" she answered, forcing a smile. "It is nothing, dear mother. I am quite well. Perhaps the heat has touched me a little. It seemed a long way to the village to-day. It must have been the heat."

"You should not have walked. You should have

had the carriage," said Mrs. Barrington, who had the mania of finding reasons and marking the fault.

"It is nothing," repeated Monica. "But I think I will go upstairs. And lie down for a little while. You will not mind my leaving you, mother? I have a little headache after all."

She spoke in a curious staccato way, her sentences disconnected one from the other; and as she spoke she passed her hand again wearily over her forehead; as she had passed it in the garden below.

"No, my dear, certainly I shall not mind your leaving me. Go and lie down till dinner-time," said Mrs. Barrington. "It is evidently the heat; and a little rest will do you good."

Monica kissed her mother, then went up-stairs; but not to lie down for the sake of her headache. On the contrary, she flung herself on her couch, and turned her face to the pillows, weeping bitterly. The strain was relaxed and the reaction came, as it needs must. But through all her tears she said to herself again and again, as if she were repeating a charm: "It will all pass, and he will marry someone else. I have done my duty and it will pass—with him, but never with me."

When the gong sounded for dinner, and she went downstairs again, she found Theodosia already installed. Anthony was dining out, officially, and the feather-headed little wife hated solitude. The atmosphere of the Dower House was certainly not very congenial to her, but it was better than loneliness; so she had come to bestow herself on her mother-in-law, and her mother-in-law had accepted the gift and made her welcome.

"My goodness, Monica!" she exclaimed as the girl came into the room; "what a ghost you look! You are as white as a sheet, and you look as if you had heard some awful news. And your eyes are as red as if you had been crying. Have you been crying, Monica?" pertly.

"Theo! what an idea!" said Monica, with a forced smile.

"My dear Theodosia, what should Monica have to cry about?" asked Mrs. Barrington seriously, looking over her spectacles as if she expected to see something strange.

"That is what I do not know, mamma; but she looks like it," said Theodosia still keeping her eyes fixed on her sister-in-law.

"Do I?" said Monica, rubbing her cheeks with forced playfulness. "Are they any redder now, Theo?"

"Your eyes are no less red," said Theodosia with a curious air of meaning. "I think there must be something in the weather to-day," she continued in her light, flippant way; "for I met Dr. St. Claire as I was coming here, and he looked as much of a ghost as you do, Monica, and as if he had been crying too. Had you been scolding him, Monica?"

Nothing was so rare to Monica as to blush. When she was most moved she usually became most pale; but now the blood rushed into her face in a rosy flood, and she answered, for her quite petulantly:

"You certainly contrive to say the most extraordinary things possible, Theo! I wonder where you get your ideas from—from nothing real I am sure!"

"From my own head—and my own eyes!" an-

swered Theodosia sharply; her bright and glittering orbs fixed with a curiously searching as well as mocking expression on her sister-in-law.

"It is a pity, my dear, they have such a poor foundation," said Mrs. Barrington calmly.

"Oh, I know, mamma, you think me a perfect idiot!" said Theodosia, tossing her head. "But I am not so silly as I look, and I see more than most people."

"Into millstones I fancy, my dear," returned her mother-in-law, taking her daughter's arm as they went in to dinner.

All that evening Theodosia was moody and somewhat morose; either strangely silent for her, or, when she spoke, decidedly snappish and cross. She spoke suddenly of Dr. St. Claire more than once, and looked sharply at her sister-in-law when she did so; and she said all sorts of disagreeable little things about him—now that she had heard he was going to marry Miss Flora Farley, or now that he was a most disgraceful and decided flirt. She seemed as if she wanted to goad Monica to some kind of defence; but she prodded in vain. The sweet dreamy eyes neither flashed nor failed, and the only answer made to her vicious sallies was: "Oh!" "Indeed!" "Really!" "Do they say so?" or the like.

Still, Theodosia was not beaten off the scent, and Monica saw that she was not. But Mrs. Barrington, who understood nothing of hidden meanings, was simply weary of, and rather offended by, the censorious pertinacity of Anthony's wife; and when she went away, the dear lady said with mild sarcasm which

was the utmost limit to which her cynicism could reach:

“Theodosia was in an unusual mood to-night. I do not know which is the more objectionable—her chatter, and frivolity, or her ill-temper and ill-nature. Ah, my poor son! what a choice he has made!”

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## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE OAKHURST INVALID.

HE had never been robust, and the life of a country doctor, which tries even the strong until well-seasoned by time and use, had evidently severely tried St. Claire. As the summer waned and the clinging chills of autumn came on, he drooped like a plant of which the roots have been cut beneath the soil. All could see that he suffered, but no one knew what ailed him; and when asked what was amiss, he invariably answered: "Nothing," and smiled as if his disclaimer carried conviction in its echo.

"The kind of thing that women love," for strength he had sweetness, for fibre grace, for stoicism patience, for courage sensibility, and for the dissimilarity of sex that likeness of morale which made women call him "so pure," and love him because he was "so sweet."

They recognized in him a man after their own ideal, one who united the mysterious charm of both sexes, but in whom the moral preponderance was given to their own. Loving him personally as a man, in spiritual comradeship he was to them as one of themselves. And their estimate was just. Like a woman he made Love the end-all and be-all of life, and held ambition itself as merely Love's strongbacked servitor. And like a woman he suffered in silence, and the very quiescence of forlornness, when his dream



faded into thin air and the fragrance of his hope burnt down into the dull ashes of despair. He sought no relief from the sorrow that possessed him, as another man might, in the lurid pleasures of dissipation, nor in the tougher struggle of ambition. He neither drank nor gamed, nor yet read hard, nor wrote with purpose; and the girlhood of Oakhurst found him as impartially indifferent as he had been from the beginning. He simply suffered with the sad patience of his kind, calling to his aid his one great moral power of endurance, and taking no one into his confidence, how much soever his heart was wrung and his spirit yearned for sympathy.

Everyone of course noticed his sudden failure in health, and everyone was talking of it. He was so pale, so dispirited, so silent, so changed altogether from what he had been—and he had never been specially florid nor specially vivacious—that no one could be blind to the fact. Though only one had the right key to the mystery, all had their favourite theories, which were aired whenever two came together to “talk things over,” and the young doctor’s evident ill-health was one of the topics touched on before they parted. Once some bold spirit suggested that he was in love; it was Miss Maria Crosby who set this little snow-ball rolling; but Mr. Chesson, the retired cheesemonger and a man of a goodly presence—Captain Farley, the weather-beaten old salt, late of the “Merchant Service”—and even Mr. Langhorne, the hard-featured lawyer who had a will of his own, and the way of getting that will of all his clients—they, and other fathers of marriageable daughters, laughed the idea to scorn.

“Love!” they said, with the disdain of men who

knew the right side of leather and the colour of skim-milk; "do you think such a poor creature as that can love? Lord bless you! he knows no more of love than a broom-stick!"

And the judgment passed current with the majority. As the young doctor had not chosen a wife from among the blooming maidenhood of Oakhurst, he had incontestably proved that he could not love.

Monica Barrington, too, had faded and become delicate almost to sickliness.

"Lord!" said the people with their noses in the air; "how much she has aged, and how awfully she has gone off!"

So she had. And yet her face had taken on itself a new kind of beauty in exchange for that which it had lost, and the spoiled complexion was redeemed by the greater lustre of the eyes and the sweeter sadness of the mouth. Her mother, however, who only saw the pallor and the fragility of form—the almost attenuation of her figure, the almost transparency of her hands—more than once wanted to send for Dr. Williamson from Staines, or even for Dr. St. Claire, if Monica thought she could trust him; or would she like to go up to London and consult some man of name and eminence? It was evident that something was not right with her, and she ought to have a doctor to learn what was wrong.

But Monica always so strenuously opposed one and all of these proposals that Mrs. Barrington had not the heart to coerce her against her will, even for her own good.

This kind of contest may often be seen between a mother and daughter, where the girl is all obedience

and prevoyance, all self-sacrifice and devotion, both in the small things of daily ordering, and the larger ones of life; but when a collision of wills does come between them, then it is the mother who yields and the daughter who triumphs. As now; when, in spite of all that Mrs. Barrington could say, Monica obstinately refused to submit her case to Dr. Williamson, Dr. St. Claire, or the eminent expert in London. So the two poor pallid, sad-eyed and sore-hearted young people looked at each other across the impassable gulf of circumstance, like ghosts doomed to wander on either side that fatal river over which no bark plies, separated for all eternity and looking, longing, sighing, in vain.

The run-down condition of Dr. St. Claire had also another inconvenience — the neighbourhood did not like it. Sick people prefer a doctor who has tone and vigour to one who is as pallid as themselves, and as limp. It does them good, on the magnetic principle, to have a large volume of life bursting like sunlight into their sick chambers, so long as that volume is not noisy, that sunlight more revivifying than irritating. Besides, the strong have most compassion. The weak are too much occupied with their own miseries to give substantial sympathy to others. Wherefore a doctor in delicate health is a mistake, and: "Physician, heal thyself," is a sarcasm which vitiates every prescription and nullifies all the good of regimen.

Thus, everything at this moment languished in poor St. Claire's garden of life, from his enfeebled health to his diminished practice, from his broken heart to his tottering fortune.

His position was becoming untenable, and the

strain was almost beyond his strength to bear. It became a matter of anxious thought with him, whether he should make one bold effort, sell the goodwill of his practice for what it would bring, and throw himself on the sea of chance; or whether he should still stay on here and do his best to conquer the love which was going near to kill him. He would have prescribed flight and change to anyone else; but had he the courage to adopt for himself the heroic remedy he would have urged on another? Could he thus give the final death-blow to that faint little hope, that melancholy pleasure of looking across the impassable gulf, which lingers like a wintry flower deep in the heart of love, even when apparently all is waste and desolation? Could he? It would be wise—but: Was it possible?

He was thinking all this one day, and he had not come to a settlement of his difficulty, when he reached Miss Maria Crosby's door and went up the stairs to give the daily attendance for which she paid as she paid for so much milk and bread in the day's dietary—so much floss-silk and so many flowers in the day's enjoyments.

"You are late to-day, doctor!" she said, with a certain fond reproach as he came into the room.

She was old enough to be the young fellow's mother; but that did not count. The mingling of the maternal instinct with the amatory makes a rich kind of emotional amalgam that has its charm; and elderly women in love with comparative boys are notoriously blind to the ridicule of their position.

"I have been busy," he said, taking his accustomed seat by the couch and beginning his daily catechism.

Against his own will he spoke coldly, almost contemptuously. Though bound by professional etiquette to undertake the care of disease which did not exist, he was often impatient with this special corner of his scanty vineyard, this special slice off his small loaf. To-day he was more impatient than usual. Really ill for his own part, this travesty of sickness put on for folly and idleness, for wantonness and vanity, disgusted him in more ways than one. And, his heart full of trouble for Monica and his hopeless love—his head on fire and his spirit passing through the Valley of the Shadow—the gestures and glances of this simpering old Amanda, this daughter of a bygone generation who wanted to be his Shulamite as she had made him her Solomon, filled him with repulsion amounting to horror. Could he have rushed out of the room, as if some “laidly worm” had been lying on the couch instead of a faded, waxen-skinned old maid who had once been pretty and who would still have been charming had she not been silly, he would have gone. But he was bound to stay for at least a few moments. Yet in all the circumstances, such as they were, was it to be wondered at if even he, the gentle, mild, and graceful Dr. Armine St. Claire, were to-day less courteous than contemptuous, less complaisant than repelling?

Miss Maria Crosby had never had cause to think that the young doctor was made of more melting material, so far as she was concerned, than the marble king in the Arabian Nights tales. But to-day he was more than usually rigid; and even the professional patience, which was part of his necessary furniture, was of a very threadbare kind as he took his place

by the couch and pursued through the vague that troop of ghosts which she called her symptoms, and which he knew to be only her fancies.

Poor Miss Maria! After all she was only the whipping-boy for the occasion. It was not her folly so much as his own misfortunes which he chastised in her. This is the way of the world. That old gentleman tying his shoe—how should he not be kicked when he lies obstructive to our way and handy to our foot, at the very moment when we are smarting with defeat and rasped sore by provocation!

Love has quick eyes; and though a woman may be a fool for being in love at all, still, whether she be wise or foolish, her heart suffers and her spirits droop when things go wrong with the beloved. The would-be Shulamite caught the uncomfortable accent of her Solomon, and met it with the ready sympathy of an affection which only wants occasion for display.

"You are not yourself to-day, dear doctor," she said, laying her hand on his arm. "What is amiss with you?"

"Nothing," he answered.

"It could not be less," returned Miss Maria. "And you have nothing to make you anxious?" she returned; "no bad cases on hand?"

"No; none," he said.

"How is John Lilley at Stair?" she asked.

"Better," he answered.

"Well, that is short!" she cried shrilly.

"Do you want me to enter into professional details? Would you understand them if I did?" he asked unpleasantly.

"Oh come now! don't be so snappy to your best

friend!" she said, with a slight laugh. "I declare you make me feel as if you had bitten my nose off!" she added, with what she meant to be girlish playfulness—poor thing.

"I am sorry if I was uncivil," he said coldly, rising to go.

Being either coquetted with, or gushed over, by Maria Crosby was really more than he could bear to-day. At all times a *corvée*—with that aching head of his, that fever in his veins and that pain round his heart—to-day it was unendurable!

"Why! what takes you away so soon?" she said, again laying her hand on his arm.

She stipulated for half-an-hour's consultation every day. It was in the bond; so much money for so much time; cash paid quarterly for attendance given daily. And to-day the young doctor had not been with her more than eight minutes by the watch on her little table.

"I must go," he said, "I am busy."

"I thought you said you had nothing on hand!" she returned. "Who is down? Is it Jenny Mason's boy? They say she had a bad night with him, but may be it was only his teeth and it has passed; so that need not take you away in such a hurry. If not Jenny Mason's child, and old John Lilley is getting better, who is it?" she asked curiously; for by virtue of her state, as she made it, unable to go out and garner for herself and dependent for dramatic excitement on the gravitation of news to her couch, she held herself entitled to know all that took place in the little town; and they did say in the place that not a hen cackled but Miss Maria Crosby knew, and could tell

the count of all the eggs that were laid between dawn and dusk. The mysterious activities of chronic invalidism were never more fully exemplified than in her; and let who would go short of local knowledge, she was always well supplied.

"I really cannot go into the details of my work with you, Miss Crosby," answered Dr. St. Claire. "You must take my word for it and allow me to end my visit."

"Then you must give me a whole hour to-morrow to make up for this skimpy call to-day," said Maria, with a fond look. "I have not told you half what I ought, you know. I have said nothing of that nasty little pain in my chest last night—just like a knife going in at my breast-bone and out between my shoulders. It quite caught my breath, doctor, and made me wonder if it was inflammation. And this morning when I woke I had such a dull aching over my right brow!—and such a big lump in my throat, like an apple stuck there, I could scarcely swallow. I thought I was in for one of my bad days, but I got better after my rum and milk; and when I got up and had my egg and brandy I was nearly right again. Still, all these flying pains mean something, don't they, doctor? There is something very wrong with my system altogether. I should like to give it a name!"

"Take some sal-volatile when you feel that pain in your throat—that lump," said Dr. St. Claire.

"Will that do me good?" she asked in the silly way of people who must speak at any cost, and who would rather talk nonsense than keep silence.

"I should scarcely have recommended it unless I thought that it would," he returned coldly.



"What a way to prescribe!" she said shrilly, again affecting girlish playfulness.

"I know of no other way, Miss Crosby. I am sorry if my manner does not please you," was his uncomfortable answer.

Her silly light brown eyes, with their sparse lashes and pink lids, filled up with tears.

"I did not mean to offend you, dear doctor," she said humbly. "I am sure you know that!"

"No, I am sure you did not," he answered, his gentlehood overcoming his ill-humour. "Forgive me if I was rude, Miss Crosby. I am not quite myself to-day."

"No, you are not, poor dear! You look put out, and are really not yourself," was her compassionate reply. "And I am sure I do not mind your being short-tempered to me if it is only because you are ill and are not vexed with me. I could not bear that!" she said with the craven fondness, the want of self-respect of the woman who loves unbidden. "I could put up with everything else and never give it a second thought; but not that!" she added tenderly. "But now tell me what has gone wrong with you," she continued as if settling herself for a long confidential, amiable talk. "I can keep a secret like anything if I am told not to tell; and no one is more interested in you, doctor, than I am," she added, with a meaning smile.

His gentler humour passed as quickly as it had come. Her manners, her smile, the coaxing tones of her voice, the caressing action of her hand, the fond glance of her faded eyes, her open love-making and

unconcealed admiration, were all too much for his nerves, already so sorely tried.

"I have no secrets to tell," he said brusquely; "and when I have, I do not tell them. If I cannot keep my own counsel, I can scarcely expect others to keep it for me."

"But I am different from others," said Maria, with a tender face. "Every one does not take the interest in you, dear doctor, that I do."

"You are very good; but I have nothing to say," said Dr. St. Claire coldly; and at that instant the door-bell rang, and the little maid, who was waiting in the hall to see the handsome young doctor as he passed through, opened it on the instant, thus cutting short the hasty retreat which else he would have made.

"Oh, bother!" said the elegant invalid with quite robust energy. "Who can it be? And I not half through my symptoms!"

Who indeed? In another instant she knew; for Mrs. Anthony Barrington and her sister-in-law, Monica, were ushered into the room, they among other great people in the neighbourhood make it a point of conscience to call on the Oakhurst invalid at stated times in the year. They had left the carriage a little way up the street, which accounted for their quasi-incognito while at the door. For else the livery and the bays would have betrayed them, and then neither would St. Claire have been taken by surprise, nor would Miss Maria have said "Bother!" with so much vigour of intonation.

"Oh, so *you* are here, are you, Dr. St. Claire," cried Theodosia with an audacious little laugh, as if

she had come upon something rather doubtful in finding the young doctor by the side of a patient.

"How do you do, Mrs. Barrington?" said Armine, ignoring the exclamation.

He turned to Monica and seemed uncertain whether to shake hands or not as he muttered rather than pronounced the prescribed formula; but Monica held out her hand in her grave, gentle way, looking as if she saw and knew nothing beyond the immediate affair of the moment:—and yet her pale face gradually changed in colour till it burnt like fire, and felt as heated as it looked. The fever-spots in St. Claire's hollow cheeks also flamed out, and the change from the pallor usual to both to this crimson inflammation did not escape the quick eyes of Theodosia nor the loving ones of Miss Maria.

"My dear Monica, how frightfully flushed you are!" said Theodosia, with malicious gaiety. "You were so white a moment ago, and now you are like a June rose!"—laughing shrilly.

"Do you find the room too warm, Miss Barrington?" asked Maria, also surprised at that sudden flush, and looking from Monica to St. Claire, though not so suspiciously, yet as sharply as Theo herself had done.

"It is coming in from the open air," said Monica calmly. She could not control her blood, but she could master her voice and manner. "But your room is not too hot, Miss Crosby," she added, with her usual gentle courtesy.

"And how well you are looking, Dr. St. Claire," continued Theodosia, in the same high-pitched key and with the same artificial and malicious gaiety. "You,

tôo, look like a June rose—two June roses in October!" she cried, laughing in her falsest manner as she so audaciously bracketed these two inequalities together.

"Well, I don't know about that, Mrs. Anthony," said Miss Maria. "The doctor has certainly got some colour now, but he was looking peaky enough not five minutes ago before you came in." Here she glanced out of the corner of her eye at Monica. "I have just been telling him he ought to take care of himself. Indeed he wants some one to take care of him—that is just it," she added, with an hysterical kind of jocularity.

"Thank you for your kind interest, Miss Crosby; but I think I can manage for myself," said Dr. St. Claire coldly.

"Oh, men are poor creatures left to themselves!" returned Miss Maria. "You had best get a wife, doctor. There are plenty in Oakhurst to choose from, I am sure."

"That is always what I say to Dr. St. Claire," said Theodosia, with an unpleasant laugh.

"May I ask you to be kind enough to leave me and my affairs alone, Miss Crosby?" said Dr. St. Claire, with strange and sudden sternness. "When I want your kind advice I will ask for it; and then it will be time enough to give it."

Theo drew herself up, her vivacious little face alight with anger, while Miss Maria's waxen skin became almost livid as she, too, bridled and resented. To be snubbed like this before these local magnates, these great ladies, whose visits counted among the highest premiums of her state—it was intolerable; and

she who had always held by the young doctor, and had been his best friend from the beginning! But never again! she thought to herself; never again! He had done for himself with her, and he might go where he would now for so constant a patient and a friend as true as she had been. To be insulted before that little chatterbox of a Mrs. Anthony, who made mountains out of molehills and told all she knew, and that queer Miss Barrington there, who was so quiet and silent that no one could be sure what she knew or what she did not know—no! that she would not bear. So he might make up his mind to have done with her, Maria Crosby, and take the consequences. It was just thirty pounds a year out of his pocket and a good friend to the back of that!—and he with his face on fire, and Miss Barrington's to match!

If she felt this, Theo felt much the same; for though the lightning had descended more directly on Miss Maria's head, the bolt had been intended for each alike, and the waxen-skinned old maid was once more rather the whipping-boy than the original offender. Mrs. Anthony was intensely indignant at the whole thing; and she resolved, like Miss Crosby, to have done with Dr. St. Claire on her own account, and to make him feel by bitter experience the worse than folly that he had committed, and the good that he had lost in consequence. And she too had her own interpretation of those crimson cheeks, of which interpretation she intended to make a present to Anthony at a convenient opportunity.

"How is Miss Major?" asked Monica, in her sudden way, breaking through the embarrassed silence which followed on St. Claire's hot words, as if she

had seen nothing, heard nothing, known nothing. "Is she quite well?"

"Quite, I thank you, Miss Barrington," said Maria, a little stiffly—very stiffly considering to whom she was speaking. "My niece enjoys the best of health, I am happy to say; she never knows an ache or a pain, and she cannot understand how others should be afflicted."

"She is an excellent nurse," said Monica, with provoking inattention to the bitter animus of Miss Crosby's words. "Every one knows what a devoted niece she is."

"She is well enough," answered Maria; "but she is young and thoughtless, as all young people are. It takes a deal of patience to bear with the thoughtlessness and selfishness of young people, Miss Barrington," she added, with a certain odd kind of personal application in her manner, deserved by Monica Barrington least of all the world.

"Yes," said Monica, as if she herself had been old.

"Some people ought not to be young," said Theo, looking full at Dr. St. Claire. "It is a great mistake."

"One which cures itself only too soon, Mrs. Barrington," returned Armine, trying to smile and to speak naturally and firmly; in both of which efforts he signally failed.

"But the process is disagreeable," she retorted. "And with some people, in some circumstances, there is no need why they should go through the unpleasantness. Young people forget themselves—forget their proper position and the respect they owe to their

superiors," she added sententiously. "Do they not, Miss Crosby?"

"Yes, indeed, too often, Mrs. Anthony," was the invalid's reply. "But when they do, they have to be just put back and taught better," she added, with a vicious tightening of her lips.

St. Claire looked over to Monica. He understood the moral of the fable, and he wanted to see whether she read between the lines with him. She was looking down while Miss Crosby had pointed Theodosia's shaft; but, stirred by some subtle magnetism, she seemed to be conscious of that mute appeal, and, raising her sweet eyes, she looked quite steadily at St. Claire, then turned to her sister-in-law, and said gently:

"But none of us here are quite so young as that, Theo. We are blaming what does not exist for any of us; and surely that is waste of time!"

How weak and nervous he was to-day! These few words were almost too much for Armine. He was like an hysterical woman whom a kind word enfeebles and a caress prostrates. He felt his heart beat and his head swim till he half feared to fall; but summoning all his courage, he got up and took his leave, afraid lest he should betray himself too clearly to the unfriendly witnesses watching him so narrowly. And of what use was even that gentle covert defence of him! They were separated as far as were ever Dives and Lazarus in the Eternal Kingdom, and there was no possibility of nearer approach. So must it be! And the best thing he could do at this moment was to tear himself from the dear presence which made all his melancholy happiness, and carry safe out of the fire

that secret which had caused his heart-break, and would cause his death.

Soon after this, the ladies also took their leave; Theodosia's face still alight with anger; Miss Maria's still livid with vexation; and Monica's by now restored to its ordinary pale and dreamy stillness, inscrutable, dumb, illegible.

When all had gone, and Rachel had come in to hear the diurnal report and receive the orders, which were part of the day's doings, she found her aunt in tears.

"Why, aunt Maria, what ever has happened!" she said. "What ever are you crying for like that!"

"He was so short-tempered, so unkind to-day!" sobbed Maria. "And before those ladies too! I would not have believed it of him!"

"If he was short I would not be so soft, if I was you, as to cry about it," said Rachel, a little stonily, not to say contemptuously.

With her own poor little hopeless romance so well concealed that no one in the whole world suspected it, her aunt Maria's open and fluid loves were beyond her patience to bear with.

"Then you just would, if you was me. If you was me, you would do exactly as I do," said her aunt, cross and philosophical in a breath. "And, Rachel, I am to have a glass of hot brandy and water—not too weak. The doctor says so," she added. "My nerves are all to pieces to-day. I want stringing up, and I know it."

"You have too many glasses of hot brandy and water, and made far too strong; that is my opinion," grumbled Rachel, below her breath, as she went to



the chiffonier where her aunt's special restoratives and stimulants were kept. "If aunt does not take care, she will get to like stimulants," she went on, still speaking to herself. "And she does already, far too much. A little now and then does no one any harm, but brandy here and brandy there, brandy for a headache and brandy because one feels low,—there is no sense in it! I'll give the doctor a hint that way, I just will! He orders these glasses far too often. And I will tell him so to-morrow when he comes. It seems a hard thing to say of one's aunt, but a stitch in time saves nine, and I don't want a tipsy maniac to wait on as well as an hysterical old woman like aunt is, even now." Aloud:—"Here, aunt Maria, is your brandy and water; and, really, the way that last bottle has gone is just dreadful."

"Then somebody has been helping themselves," said Maria, snappishly. "For I am sure I never drank it all!"

"Every drop," returned Rachel solemnly.

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## CHAPTER IX.

## BROKEN DOWN.

It was either the damp, ungenial day, or it was Miss Maria Crosby's "gush," or haply it might be the excitement and confusion of feeling caused by the painful interview with Theodosia and Monica, which gave the final blow to his tottering health. Be that as it may, when Dr. St. Claire went home that afternoon, after he had offended Mrs. Anthony Barrington and made his love-sick patient his enemy, he was so ill that he was obliged to go to bed, and the next day he was constrained to send for Dr. Williamson, of Staines, the popular consulting physician of the district. By him he was pronounced to have congestion of the lungs, as he already suspected; with complications of a grave kind to add to what was already a sufficiently grave condition.

Here, then, was the end of the first act in the sad little drama—the total break-down of the handsome, friendless, moneyless young doctor, wasted by his unhappy love to so much physical weakness, as to be rendered seriously ill by the first breath of biting east wind—the first clammy chills of autumn. It was a sad pass, into which he had fallen for the present, and the future outlook was even worse. For his chest attack, acute to-day, would be chronic to-morrow; and though he might recover now, with care, he was booked

for consumption, without a hope of escape, if he did not go to some warm climate for the winter. This was his only chance—his only hope of permanent and solid recovery. So said Dr. Williamson; and so said his learned brother from London, who chanced to be down there on professional business, and who, with the ready help of his class, drove over to Oakhurst to see this poor young co-professional, making such rapid shipwreck on the rough sands of life. To tell Armine St. Claire that he must give up his practice, and go to some warm climate for the next six months, where he might live in idleness and sunshine, was like that typical recommendation of turtle soup and champagne to a Dorsetshire labourer, with six children, and thirteen shillings a week to keep them on—like the bland prescription of total rest to the journalist, who has to live at high pressure and in the centre of things, if he is to live at all. But doctors do not trouble themselves about ways and means. These are not in their province. Their business is to indicate the road which must be taken—the means of transport is your affair, and your banker's. As now,—when Dr. Williamson ordered South Italy, at first generally, and then Palermo specifically, for the young fellow who had not twenty pounds before him, and left it to chance, that fairy god-mother of men, to supply him with the funds necessary for the journey and six months' idleness.

It was just the want of these funds which made the difficulty. The practice could be managed. A good honest young fellow, who had scraped through his last examination with as little credit as could be this side of failure, and whose heart was in the bush, had agreed to take care of the patients until such time

as their own lawful Æsculapius should return. He would be a faithful kind of lieutenant, and there would be no fear of his turning out a usurper. He would be a warming-pan, but neither a snake nor a cuckoo; and so far he was satisfactory. But how to find the money to make this lieutenantancy possible? to supply the warming pan with coals? How indeed! Who on earth could tell!

Dr. Williamson spoke freely of the affair to all the neighbourhood—to no one more than to another, but freely to all alike. He had a kind of idea that they might get up a general subscription for this disabled healer of rickety bodies. Wherefore he detailed the case to every one in town, dwelling much on the absolute necessity there was for Dr. St. Claire to spend the winter in Palermo if he were to be saved from consumption and premature death. But—and here he always shrugged his shoulders—where was the money to come from? It was a matter of life and death to St. Claire; but if he could not raise the funds?

He spoke with unction, with sincere compassion; and he spoke, as was said, to every one alike—to the Barringtons and the Chessons; the high and the low—always hoping, but never suggesting, that some one would propose a general subscription by which that revivifying southern sun should be rendered possible.

Edward Formby so far took fire at the idea as to write a note to St. Claire, offering to lend or to give, whichever he liked best, such a sum of money as would enable him to obey Dr. Williamson's orders. It was a bluntly-worded letter, with one or two mistakes in spelling, and without an attempt at style. A charity schoolboy would not have done much worse. All the

same, it was of a finer quality than many which might have been composed in classic Greek with a faultless translation into Latin hexameters. Intellect is god-like, truly; and education is the hall-mark of intellect; but nobility of feeling has its value as well as breadth of philosophic speculation; and kind-hearted, generous, somewhat illiterate Edward Formby, still with that broad strong hand of his scattering his wild oats along the highway, had a place in the hierarchy which certain of the erudite might have envied.

The offer was refused. Though his lines had fallen in evil places, and though the family Pactolus had run so miserably dry, St. Claire had not lost with his money the high spirit and independence characteristic of the English gentleman. If put to it, he would rather lose his life than owe it to polite pauperism. Wherefore he thanked the good fellow who so generously offered to be his banker; and he thanked him warmly; but always as one man with another, one equal with another—and refused to accept as a loan what he knew would be substantially a gift.

When Edward Formby read this answer, he swore a good round oath between his small square teeth—an oath of the kind which the Recording Angel blots out as soon as inscribed. But in swearing, though he cursed the young fellow's pride, he respected his independence; felt more than ever convinced that he was a gentleman of the right sort, though only a country practitioner; and was more than ever his sincere friend.

Theodosia Barrington also touched the subject of a gift of money to enable the young doctor to spend the winter in Palermo. She had still a strong interest

in St. Claire; but interest of as unfriendly a kind as it had formerly been eulogistic. She talked of him as much as ever, but her talk was seasoned with gall, not sweetened with honey; and when she proposed this sum of money to her husband she spoke as if she had been speaking of a dole to a beggar. The change in her tone, however, was lost on Anthony. He was far too dense to understand these minor subtleties, and never troubled his hard brain with things which were not to be demonstrated.

"Give that young man a sum of money?" he repeated with a short laugh. "No, Theo, certainly not! A man must fight for himself in this world, and it is of no use to bolster up the weak. If Dr. St. Claire is worth saving, he can save himself. The fittest survive and the unfit fall through the meshes. And so it must be. I will hear of no such folly as sending him money. Let his own friends come forward. Why should we? What claim has he on us?"

"None at all," said Theo; "but if he has no friends?" she added, opposition leading her to justice.

"Then let him make them," answered Anthony.

"Well, dear, I am sure *I* do not care about him!" said Theo quickly; "but I think it would be better for every one if he left Oakhurst for a little while. He is of no use here; and dreamy, sentimental girls may find him too interesting as he is!"

"What is that to me?" said Anthony.

He looked at his little wife as he spoke, and something in the vicious vivacity of her face struck him as strange and unusual.

"What do you mean, Theo?" he said.

"Oh, nothing!" she answered, with a little toss of her head.

"Yes, you do mean something," he repeated slowly. "What is it, Theo?"

"Nothing, dear, really nothing," she said. "I dare say I am a little goose—mamma always says I am one—but it has struck me more than once that Monica likes this young man more than she would confess if she were asked; and I am sure he likes her."

"What confounded rubbish are you talking, Theo?" said Anthony, with profound disdain. "If I believed you, I would thrash that fellow to within an inch of his life! Do, for Heaven's sake, have more sense, child! My sister care a button for a country doctor? Can you not find her an innamorato among the plough-boys? I do verily believe, Theo, that sometimes you take leave of your senses. You are really too childish!"

"Am I?" laughed Theo, oddly. "Perhaps I am. But you need not be so cross, bearikins. If I am a fool, you ought to have patience with me. I did not make myself!"

"Oh, you are sharp enough," said Anthony. "It is only your imagination that you allow to run away with you. You are no fool, child, but you are wild."

"Am I?" she answered; saying softly to herself: "I have more brains and sharper eyes than all of you put together, you Barringtons!—and I can see clearly where you are all stone-blind."

One evening Dr. St. Claire was sitting moodily by his solitary fireside. Weak, ill, dispirited, now that he was shut up within the four walls of his cheerless home, all chance of seeing Monica at an end, and the horizon of his life as circumscribed as its activities,

he had but one desire—to get away. It was the well-known desire of moral sickness, finding the cause of failure in everything but itself—in the place, the air, the food, the room, the very paper on the walls, the day's duties and the day's doings. If any or all of these could be changed, then the damaged lung would be healed, the peccant liver would be relieved, the impoverished blood would be enriched. If only he could leave Oakhurst and this dingy room hung with that bilious buff-coloured paper and carpeted with that hideous arrangement in green and red! He was sick to death of Mrs. Farley's jellies and Mrs. Chesson's chicken-broth—sick and weary of all the attentions heaped on him by the kind-hearted bourgeoisie of the place. The birds from that good fellow at Hillside were pleasant; and the grapes from the Dower House did him more good than all Dr. Williamson's prescriptions; but, save these, all other offerings, contributions, attentions—whatever they might be called—revolted and annoyed him. If only he could raise money enough to get away for that six months' change!—if only he could go!

Sick and weary, lamenting and miserable, he sat there wrapped in his landlady's shawl, with his great-coat about his knees, the very picture of masculine desolation, eating out his heart and given over to despair, when the door bell was rung sharply; and immediately after the servant brought in a letter. It had come through the post in the ordinary way and he did not recognize the handwriting. When he opened it, he found wrapped in an inner cover bank-notes to the amount of three hundred pounds. "From a friend" was written in an unknown hand on the



enclosure. It was in the same handwriting as was the address; and both were evidently feigned for the occasion.

The blood gathered round his heart, and he felt as if the days of miracles were not yet over. Who could have sent that money? It might be Edward Formby who had taken this method to ensure compliance with his wish. And yet it was scarcely like him! He was kind and generous, and a good fellow all round; but this was more a woman's way of doing things than likely with him. It had in it a spice of romance, of delicacy, of sentiment, which did not fit in with his character. He was so much more direct than this. No, it was not Edward Formby. Nor was it likely to be Mrs. Chesson, the wife of the retired cheesemonger, and the mother of little Rose; for though both father and mother had made unmistakeable overtures to him in the first days and when his sun was shining bright, they had dropped him now when he was broken and his sun was eclipsed. It might be Mrs. Goss the widowed landlady of the "Fox and Grapes," who was reported worth twenty thousand pounds if a farthing, and who had no children. She had made the young doctor understand that he had only to ask and have, and that if he chose to play the part of the fox, she would take care he should not find the grapes sour. It might be she. He hoped not; and he must find out. It could not be Miss Maria Crosby. She too, like the Chessons, had dropped him in his trouble. It was not the Anthony Barringtons. Mr. Anthony would not—of that he was certain—and Mrs. Anthony could not. She had a very small dowry, and Anthony's big hand was close-fisted. The

blood burnt in his face like fire, as his thoughts touched at last the central point round which they had wandered. But he put the supposition aside. It could not be from Her. He would not believe it; though, should it be, every shilling would be hallowed like the silver crown of the Madonna, like the silver offering at her shrine. But no! It was not! it was not! Nor was it from Mrs. Barrington, who, though well-off, was not rich, and, though benevolent, was not in any way lavish in her generousities. And this was a lavish gift—a lordly, royal, queenly gift. No! no!—it was not Mrs. Barrington, therefore it was not from the Dower House. It was a gift flung down from the clouds—a gift sent by the fairy godmother, unwitnessed and unsigned. He would do his best to trace it to its source; but failing the discovery of that source—and how could he ever strike it?—he must accept the money as it was sent, and use it according to its purpose.

And thus it was that, all inquiry proving in vain, the handsome young doctor left Oakhurst and England for a winter's sojourn in Palermo to heal his damaged chest if not his broken heart.

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## CHAPTER X.

## IN THE SUNNY SOUTH.

THE neighbourhood which had accepted its handsome young doctor with reluctance now parted from him with regret, which soon deepened till it reached down to blame. By this time people had got used to him, and they did not like the trouble of getting used to any one else. And as all men are prone to find a moral fault in an unpleasant circumstance, the Oakhurst world, following the general law, spoke of St. Claire's touched lung as if it had been an ethical obliquity, and of his escape from fogs and east winds as if it had been flight from his creditors, or a disinclination to face the overhauling of some mud-pie of his own making.

Little cared the poor heart-broken invalid for all this frothy ebullition of ill-temper. But the less he cared the more it frothed. For nothing creates more enemies than that kind of dignified self-respect which neither asks favours nor makes advances, nor yet concessions. As some owe the lustre of their names to the diligent polishing of camaraderie, so others never get a fair hearing for want of a herald to announce and a chorus to echo. A man must be cap in hand to the world if he wants that world to pat him on the head. Independence and having the courage of your opinions—trusting to your own integrity and the sin-

cerity of your intentions—doing the best you know and not touting for trumpeters—standing aloof from all “camorras” and neither buying the advocacy of others nor selling your own—all this raises you up as many enemies as there are influential persons who like to be entreated; and those who would have been your judicious bottle-holders, had you had a flexible spine and a glozing tongue, now pelt you with stones because you hold your head straight and forswear flunkeydom.

This, the experience of so many, was now also St. Claire’s. He had never sought to make his way other than by putting conscience into his daily life—attending faithfully to his patients, and standing free of both favouritism and gossip. He had never sought to create a party for himself, nor to establish relations with one already made. Consequently now, when he had put the neighbourhood to inconvenience and made it cross and surly, he found the disadvantages attached to isolation and received the punishment awarded to independence. He bore it all, however, with that equanimity of pride doubled with gentleness which was his characteristic; wrote his formal notes of temporary leave-taking to his patients, recommending Mr. Benjamin Hoskins as his locum-tenens in his absence; spoiled half-a-dozen good sheets of paper before accomplishing his note to Mrs. Barrington of the Dower House; and wrote a curiously composite affair to Edward Formby, of Hillside—this man who was his friend, yet destined by the fitness of things to be Monica Barrington’s husband.

Finally he got all things in train, then left Oakhurst for the sunny South and the restoration of his damaged

lung; hoping that his heart would grow lighter as his air-cells grew freer, for life such as he had made it by his hopeless love for Monica was emphatically not worth living.

Though he had lived for so many years in France this was Armine's first visit to Italy, and he yielded, as do so many of us, to the subtle charm which pervades all earth and sky there in the blessed sunshine beyond the Alps. With him as with some others Italy meant Love; and Love was Monica. All that he felt, all that he saw, was full of her. It was a kind of inverted pantheism with Love and Monica in the place of Nature and God. Wherever he went he took her with him by the way and found her waiting for him at the end. Her presence was ever about him, but more as a sensation, as an influence, than a circumstance. In the luminous skies he was conscious of her face, veiled by the filmy mists and overpowered by the refulgent sunshine, but ever there like the stars, looking down on him with the large grave love of the Divine. The soft outlines and pearly shadows of the clouds reminded him of her hands and hair and the gracious attitudes in which she rested. The blue hills of Fiesole and the azure depths where Vallombrosa lies hidden, were like her eyes. Looking over from the Certosa he seemed to see her there, like that Spirit of whom nature is but the transparent garment. The sweet autumn air, fragrant with fruit and the ruddy breath of dying vine-leaves, was redolent of her. The stars spelt out her name; in the tender glory of the dawn he saw the tremulous beauty of her smile; in the sunset the mystery of her thoughts; in the mild radiance of the moon the unsullied purity of her life. The

flowers in the streets brought back the memory of that quaint garden where his happiness had been cut down to the roots with the lilies and the pansies; and the faded roses reminded him of her home. Those faded roses with their sweet and sad associations! He cherished them as one cherishes the flowers taken from the bier of the beloved, the fragrance of which for ever after brings with it the sense of death. The windows, garlanded with golden melons and crimson pomidori, were frames wherein his fancy set her sweet face as the living picture. A woman and a child praying before a shrine in the open street, suggested her. The dim light of churches and the subdued chant of the hidden monks; the sun-touched clouds of incense hanging in golden vapour about the altar and rising like incorporate prayer from earth to heaven; the ecstatic adoration of the blue-robed nuns; the simple worship of the all-believing poor; the mild face of the Madonna, type of perfected womanhood and refuge of afflicted souls; all phrases of prayer, all forms of devotion, were as words and messages from her; they called his soul to higher things, and those higher things were Monica. The dark eyes of the women and the appealing smiles of the olive-skinned children; the soft language with its lingering accent, like a caress on the mouth; the orange-gardens dropping with shining gold; the pearly green of the olive-trees suggesting a wreath for the beloved head—olive and jasmine to crown her queen among all fair ladies; the palaces which seem to have been built for homes of a statelier, nobler passion than ours; the pictures, those immortal flowers from the root of faith—all meant one thing only—Love; and Love was Monica. All his dreams,

all his vague desires, all his wishes, his enjoyments, his regrets, were filled with her, surrounded by and centred in her. Italy was but another name for her—this divine Italy which means to the loving—Love. He lived as in the secret heart of that great Spirit whom some men call nature, others beauty, and whom he knew to be Monica. She was the soul of all things, and all things were her visible expression. Her presence surrounded him as a garment in which she had enwrapped him; his head was on her heart; her arms held him on her knees. He lived with her ever and ever—here in the cities and among the vineyards of this fair Eden where Love is the lord of life—this noonday couch of the sun where dreams are more precious than actualities elsewhere.

He had come here to be healed of his damaged lung and broken heart; but the process seemed somewhat doubtful. His love had increased, not diminished, by absence and environment—can love which is real do aught else? True, it was not embittered nor was his wound inflamed; but it was more and more incorporate with his whole being—like a symphony of minor chords running through the psalm of life. He loved her!—he loved her! He loved her as a woman, sick with sad thoughts and pale with fruitless dreams, loves the man whose happiness she can never make and whose love she may never know. He loved her hopelessly, despairingly, without the power to overcome or the possibility to fulfil; with unrecognized devotion; with unrewarded fidelity; with tears which no one saw; with sacrifice which no one accepted. Her image was at once his talisman and his torture; the thought of her at once his pain and his delight.

Italy was to heal him; but surely this was not healing! To dream of Monica through the night and to be conscious of her spiritual presence through the day—to see her in the art of Florence, in the ruins of Rome, in the burning life of Naples—to make her the goddess, standing supreme and ever young in the reconstructed temples of Pæstum—to place her as the lady, triumphant in her beauty, by the restored fountains of Pompeii—to search for her like a child in the darkness and to spring up in the morning as if sure to find her coming to meet him through the day—to move as in a trance where her hand led him and her feet kept time and pace with his—to see all things as mere forms of her—to make all feeling subordinate to love for her—was this healing? It would not seem so. Yet his health visibly improved in spite of his sadness. He lost his cough; the pain in his side abated; his fever waned as his strength waxed; his pale face became less deathly in hue and a healthier carnation took the place of those two hectic spots on his hollow cheeks; his attenuated hands were not so transparent and his prominent knuckles became less manifest. He was evidently in better physical condition than when he had left the dear despair of Oakhurst. Italy had begun the cure which Sicily was to complete; and his grave was not yet dug.

So one fine evening he took his passage aboard the swift and sensitive little "Galileo Galilei," and crossed over a waveless sea to that beautiful island of Calypso, that fragrant garden of Armida, where fair and flowerful Palermo lies like a pearl in the heart of the Golden Shell.

For some time the strangeness of all about him



sufficed for St. Claire's amusement. There were a few people in the hotel with whom he made that kind of travelling acquaintance which may be so pleasant and may be so tiresome; and the streets and buildings, the novelty and colour, made up the rest. He occupied his evenings in writing to Monica poetry which would never be published; in setting songs to music which would never be played; working up his sketches wherein he always placed her figure, for the delectation of no one but himself. She was ever in his mind here as in Florence, as in Rome, as in Naples. And though he knew that all this was like living on luscious poison, he preferred that poison to wholesome food; and justified his folly as the loving do.

At last he got tired of what he had in his outward life and wanted more.

The runners from Sferricavallo; the grand old staircases and courtyards to be found in the city; the curiously painted carts with their harness and trappings glittering with glass, flashing with brass, noisy with bells and clinking metal, feathered here and hung with fox-tails there; the beauty of the children; the lovely faces of the women of the Greek colony—lovelier for their picturesque head-gear; the linen that flutters from every balcony giving the city the look of being always "imbandierata" and "in festa;" the bougainvillea crimsoning all the walls which look to the south where it can live in the sunshine; the summer flowers of England to be had now in the winter gardens; Monreale and the Palatine Chapel; the walks and drives; the villa Giulia and the Favorita—it was all very interesting, very lovely; but he had seen it often enough now to be satisfied, and he had no very special interest in

his companions at the hotel. They were only of the usual kind; and the usual kind is not exciting.

Then he remembered the letter of introduction that he had brought with him from Edward Formby to a certain Captain Stewart of Palermo, from whom he was promised that kind of courteous hospitality which is so precious to a stranger in a foreign land.

For the matter of that, hospitality was in the Stewart blood—as well as certain other things not quite so commendable. Hospitality and large lines of living had so disastrously wasted a fine estate that, when the present proprietor came to his own, he inherited almost as many debts as rents, and for every acre had a mortgage to correspond. The whole thing was as unsubstantial as a rock that has been honey-combed by the borers, or the roof-tree of a house that has been hollowed by white ants. It was impossible for Ralph Stewart to remain at his own place, making this miserable fight with conditions as they were and appearances as they ought to be—with creditors clamouring for their dues on the one side and the family name demanding its sacrifice of gold on the other. So, letting the whole concern, he went off to Palermo as the best place he could think of for the preservation of his wife's health, which was delicate, and the husbanding of his own resources, which were slender. Here he could live well on what would have been comparative poverty in England; and be as much of a social personage as if he had possessed thrice his amount of revenue. The place was beautiful, the climate good; the English colony at that time was large and flourishing; the Palermitans themselves were pleasant, hospitable, kind-hearted, and fond of the

English as brother islanders and the traditional free-men of Europe; and an honourable as well as an agreeable life could be made beneath the shadow of Monte Pellegrino. He could not do better, and he might do much worse. Accordingly he packed up his lares and penates, parted with his homestead, and sailed over the seas with his wife, his infant daughter Clarissa, and his pretty young sister Helen—Helen of the golden hair and credulous heart—and established himself as a permanent resident and landowner in the fruitful tract lying between Monte Cuccio and the sea.

He lived about two miles or more out of the town in a pretty villa in the Giardino Inglese—the Villa Clarissa, as it was called, in gallant commemoration of his wife and little daughter, according to the graceful Sicilian fashion. And his preservation from harm, up to this day, was one of the standing marvels of the colony. He had gone there at a time when brigands and mafiosi were assumed to hold the fee-simple of all the land in and about Palermo; when no man who valued his life, his ears, or his liberty ventured beyond a certain point in the Giardino Inglese on the one side, and of the Marina on the other; when people asked him: Was he mad to place himself so entirely out of the range of protection and civilisation? and, Was it not a tempting of Providence to thus despise all ordinary precautions and the rules observed by those who knew? when those who went for their “villeggiatura” to the villas round about went with their armed retainers as well as their household goods, feeling that they carried their lives in their hands and that they must be prepared to stand a siege and make

an effective defence if they would not incontinently lose them; when blood-curdling stories were told of this brigand-chief's audacity and that brigand-band's brutality—stories circulating from lip to lip, growing as they went, till the women shrieked if so much as a beetle boomed by in his heavy flight through the darkening air, and the men gathered together with pale cheeks and flashing eyes, priming their matchlocks and whispering their plans of defence, if only a mule stirred in his stall or a goat butted at the closed door; when the island was still under the heel of the Bourbons, before Naples had freed herself from her yoke or Garibaldi had come over the mountains to haul down King Bomba's flag and plant in its stead the gracious tricolour of *Italia Una—Italia Libera!*

He had gone out there at a time of general social disorder and political discontent, and every one prophesied that he would either be shot in his own vineyard or carried off to the mountains, to arrive piecemeal to his friends unless a ruinous and impossible ransom were forthcoming.

But Ralph Stewart, sometime Captain in the Engineers, merely laughed when the croakers mapped out his doom; for all answer to their prophecies and remonstrances saying curtly: "I am not afraid"—upheld by that odd British pride of courage as well as obtuseness of imagination, which refuses to fear and is unable to recognize danger.

As the family had not been shot, nor carried off to the mountains, nor in any other way molested by those mysterious and ubiquitous beings who were to the popular imagination what ghosts are to the timid, they were looked on with a certain respect by the rest of

the community, and regarded as modern Achillides—of whom, however, the vulnerable part had not yet been found. But it was there and some day it would be touched. Brigands and mafiosi were facts, they said; and why should one man only, and he a foreigner, have the secret of immunity?

There were not wanting some who gave it as their private opinion—said below their breath—that Captain Stewart was himself a mafiose, and so far in league with the brigands who hung like a cloud on the horizon of life, in that he paid them black-mail to keep them quiet and himself safe. The want of proof did not vitiate the hypothesis. Certain folk who go to Sicily are so resolute to find brigands and the mafiosi wherever they turn, the only thing to do is to give them their heads and let them career over the fields of superstitious fancy at their will. Their belief may be no more real than those garments woven out of air with which the shivering king sought to cover his nakedness; but what of that? Belief has always been grandly independent of proof, and faith in the power of evil has ever been omnipotent with men. Let those who like it believe if they will that all Palermo is mafiose; that their best friends are mafiosi, who will sell them to the Leone of the day with no more remorse than if they were so many heads of cattle or boxes of oranges; that their physician and their guarda-porta, the police and the peasantry, the servants and the shopkeepers, the nobles themselves, and, above all, the street-coachmen, are all of this vague, all-pervading, and intangible society, and that those who deny these wide-spread ramifications are the most

mafiose of all. It was what they said of Captain Stewart, because he lived two miles out of Palermo, and had not been captured, nor killed—what nine-tenths of the colony believed and said boldly, and the other tenth repeated with disclaimers of a half-hearted kind. And yet, for all the exaggeration created by superstition and terror, the mafia existed then as it exists now, and you do hold the hand of a mafiose in yours with no more consciousness of your friend's affiliation than you have of the day of his death, or of your own. And Captain Stewart cherished in his own household a member of this strange and secret society, to whose good-will he owed more than he either suspected or perceived.

Mafiose for his own part, as some said him to be, or as free from complicity as from crime, as said others—whether owing his security to judicious payments made by driblets to obviate the necessity of a future ransom in a lump, or protected by his own courage, and the good luck that follows on conduct—however that might be, Captain Stewart managed to live at peace with all men, and to enjoy life as much as an Englishman of active habits and broken career can enjoy it in a country where the “*dolce far niente*” takes the rank of a science, and Nature herself discourages industry and discredits energy. He had a garden which was his delight, and wherein he grew every flower and shrub and tree which the soil would nourish and the ardent sun permit to live. He had an orange-garden too, whence he drew part of his income, and where he grew such fruit as was scarcely to be had elsewhere. He had a mill where he ground

his own and other people's corn, and where he made a profit on his labour when the grist-tax was imposed.

He had a clump of olives which gave him oil; a patch of "fichi d'India" which gave him fruit for his own family and a surplus for the market; a vineyard which gave him wine—and excellent wine too; and he lived a quiet, useful, half-patriarchal life, much respected by the many, mortally feared by the few; with the whispered word "Mafiose" as the echo to his name, but with open honour from all men—and from none more than from those who most affected to believe him so far an annuity to the brigands.

His own men at once loved and feared, respected and dreaded, him. For though even-tempered for the most part, as became one who thought self-control the essential element of moral manhood, he was both furious and implacable when fully roused; and those in his employ were wont to say that they venerated him as a saint and dreaded him as a devil. What they were always forced to add was, that saint or devil, placid or furious, he was ever just, and his word was to be relied on.

It was this quality of justice, this absolute trustworthiness, which gave him his hold over the men. They cheated him in little things, but were loyal to him in great matters; and his comparative obtuseness, springing as it did from the large nobleness of his nature, caused their moral respect, if it carried with it their intellectual contempt.

"The padrone is a fool," they used to say among themselves; "but he is an angel as well."

To which once the head man, Vincenzo, a sharp-

witted fellow, answered carelessly: "Fools make the best angels. It is the devil who has the brains."

Which daring speech, coupled with other things characteristic of Vincenzo, terrified the more superstitious of the household, and got him increased influence in the place where already he had too much.

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## CHAPTER XI.

## BY NATURE AND BY ADOPTION.

THE Stewart family at this time consisted of the Captain and his wife; their daughter, a little over twenty-three years of age; and a girl two years younger—just lately come to her majority—whom they called their adopted daughter and treated in all outward matters as they treated their own. They had taken her, they said, as a companion for Clarissa; as it was not well for a child to grow up without a playmate of her own age and sex to teach her unselfishness by sharing with her the cares of the elders and the love of the world. But who this child was—who were her father and mother beyond the vague designation of “friends of Captain Stewart’s”—what was her real name, birth, or nationality—remained a profound mystery to everyone save Captain and Mrs. Stewart themselves. The Englishmen of the colony called her Miss Ione; the Palermitans, “la bella Signorina;” Clarissa clipped her name to Nony, and Captain Stewart to Io; but his wife, to whom familiarities were an abomination savouring of democracy and barmaids, always called her Ione, with all the letters carefully pronounced. Sometimes, when she spoke of her in private to her husband, she said, “that poor girl,” or “that unfortunate child.”

Mrs. Stewart treated this girl whom she had adopted as her own with a certain gentle but persistent coldness, which seemed like the chronic displeasure of a kind-hearted woman, without active ill-will for the one part but immovable in her prejudices for the other. She did not wish to show that she resented the child's presence here among them, as in truth she did; nor yet did she wish to be unkind. Nor was she, according to her lights. She, like her husband, was always quite just to Ione. So much must be conceded for truth's sake. In the girlish quarrels which necessarily arose between the two children, Mrs. Stewart was careful to keep the balance exactly even; giving the blame where it was due—if anything indeed, more inclined to blame her own than that other. But justice is not love; and Ione used to feel that she would rather have had the scolding and the love than this icy justice which "gave her reason," but denied her affection. She lived on the outside of the family life, so far as love and confidence went; and as in her childhood vaguely, so now in her girlhood was she keenly, conscious that she was an unwelcome, albeit, it was to be supposed voluntarily, adopted member of the household. She knew that she was not Clarissa's real sister, and that Captain and Mrs. Stewart, whom she had been taught to call papa and mamma, were her parents by adoption only, not by the grace and gift of nature. Whose child she was—who were her true father and mother—was the one secret which she could not prevail on them to divulge. Nor did Clarissa know; else in all probability the confidence of their state and age would have made the secret of the one the open possession of the other.

Since she had wakened up to conscious mental life, Ione had had two great desires—that of knowing who were her parents, and that of leaving the home where she was sheltered but not cherished. She longed to know herself and to be with her own; and she longed to be free from an obligation which pressed upon her like an intolerable burden, and which she felt was as onerous to these others as to her. If she could but make her own living independent of all aid! But how? She could do nothing that would give her only the elementary “*piatto di maccherone*” a day. She was too indolent to give herself up to earnest study and really hard brain-work. For all her electric force, she burnt herself out in impatient desire of, rather than in steady preparation for, the freedom she so ardently craved. She had learned nothing thoroughly and not very much even superficially. Music was the art wherein she had touched the highest level; but that highest level was a very modest altitude at the best, and she could neither have played in public nor have taught in private. For the rest she was nowhere. In matters of moral speculation—that region of thought known by the name of “opinions”—she put her intellect into forming judgments without knowledge. She adopted only the one side, and refused to consider the other; liking to “think things out of herself,” as she used to say, rather than to learn from experience or to be guided by better knowledge. It was the easiest thing to do. It gave life more colour, by reason of the normal attitude of opposition in which she held herself. It strengthened in her that sense of isolation and martyrdom by which she made herself unpleasant and the others uncomfortable; and it widened the distance

already by the nature of things separating her from her pseudo family.

With this impatience with things as they were and inability to work herself clear of them, there was but small chance of her marrying. She had no marriage portion; for Clarissa's was too small to divide; and naturally in this their own came first with the father and mother who had shared all else. Ione was not much liked by the English colony; and Italians do not take kindly to dowerless wives. They adored her to a man, here in Palermo; but a portionless bride did not come into their ordering of social life, and they could only look and long and sigh, and pass by like erotic Levites on the other side. How then could she leave this home which was her prison?—this beautiful island which was her rock of exile?—these caretakers who were not her parents and whom she counted as her gaolers? Failing the god coming down from the skies to carry her off, a second Europa, a gladder Proserpine, a more fortunate Psyche—failing the deliverer who would be to her what Perseus was to Andromeda, the consoler who would be to her what Dionysos was to Ariadne—it seemed unlikely that she would be rescued or relieved; and patience was the weary lesson set her by pain to learn.

As for the sister whom Captain Stewart had brought over with him when he first came, she had remained with them a couple of years only. The climate did not suit her, and she had left rather hurriedly. A few months after her departure the family went into mourning, for poor foolish credulous Aunt Helen was dead; and the Captain went to England to bury her. She had been but a shadow crossing the field of the

Stewart history, as transacted at Palermo; but more than one thought of her with pleasure and remembered her with regret. Even to this day the image of "la bella Elena" was in some sense a sacred memory to one to whom little in heaven or earth beside was sacred. Who that one was Ralph never knew. There were some secrets which Helen could not keep, but this she did to the day of her death. She had translated the old phrase: "Not wisely, but too well," to her own enduring sorrow; but at least she kept the clue close hidden, and the robber who had despoiled her was never known. Indeed, like those cunning birds which lure the seeker after their nests far away from where they lay close to his feet, Helen contrived to throw suspicion on a passing stranger, who had come and gone and vanished into darkness, the more thoroughly to divert it from that handsome and penniless young Prince whose morals were as loose as his pedigree was exalted. Penniless as he was, with an income which gave him just one room; a balcony for a few pots of flowers and his chair, whence he could survey all that passed, and be seen of all passers; enough wine and macaroni for his simple sustenance; a good coat for "la società," and a carriage for the evening drive—marriage for reparation was out of the question; and the weaker had to bear the burden. Helen was self-betrayed, but the Prince was both undiscovered and unsuspected; and for his own part he took care never to show the Englishman that tress of golden hair which he kept in his desk, along with some others, and labelled "La bella Elena." Also, as time went on, he took care not to show anything like especial interest in Ione as she grew up under his

eyes, and nature revealed to him the secret which the Stewarts thought no living man divined—as indeed how should any?

But what Captain and Mrs. Stewart themselves did not even suspect, the Prince's own friends knew from end to end, and kept as religiously as if it had been a Carbonari oath, or a mafiose sign. If in Italy "*tutto si dice, tutto si sa*," the saying holds good for Italians only. We foreigners do not participate; and our concerns are discussed, our secrets are told before our eyes, while we see no more than if we were stone-blind. As now, in this matter of Ione's parentage, of which the Stewarts knew only half the truth, and the Prince and all his friends the whole.

Among these friends was his own nephew Vincenzo; the same who, not having even his uncle's pittance, and being thus forced to work for his daily bread, had taken service under the Captain, and was now the head man of the mill, and the most trusted of all the "*impiegati*" at the Villa Clarissa.

The two Stewart girls were equally pretty, so that it was not from jealousy that the father and mother thrust Ione on the edge of the family nest and kept her on the outskirts of the family life and love. Indeed some would have said, as the Stewarts naturally thought, that Clarissa was the prettier of the two. It all depended on the individual taste and amount of artistic perception possessed by the critic, which was the more admired. But artistic perception is not a certain quantity, and taste cannot be proved like an algebraic equation; and those who upheld the supremacy of the one had always a margin left whereon to record the claims of the other. The verdict was never

more than one of comparative degrees of praise, which left no more room for condemnation than for bitterness.

Both girls were fair; but this fairness was quite different in character, the one from the other. Clarissa had that kind of light brown hair which the French call "*blonde cendrée*"—perfectly smooth and glossy, and as soft as so much spun silk. It was fine, long, thick, in every way creditable hair; and to be counted as a beauty, if not indeed taking rank as a minor moral virtue. It was always carefully brushed and noticeably neat. It was obedient, well-conditioned, well-trained hair—hair with never a line broken nor a tress astray—hair which plaited to perfection, and which would have enabled the girl to have played the part of Lady Godiva had need been, when she unloosed those long thick coronals, so neatly wound about her small smooth head, and let them fall in a shining curtain almost to her feet. Everything was small and round and smooth about Clarissa. Her head was small and smooth and round; so was her forehead; so were her rose-leaf cheeks; so also was her nice little chin, like the half of an ivory ball with a cleft in the middle. She had not an angle anywhere; and she was as soft as a well-stuffed satin pincushion, or a bird with all its feathers puffed out. Her arched and somewhat indefinitely marked eyebrows were of the same shade of brown as was her hair; so were her eyelashes—these last being rather short and thin. Her eyes were as blue as two big turquoise beads, whereof the holes or pupils were patently small. Her nose was perhaps a little too void of character, but it was a nice nose on the whole, with a good outline if

a little unfinished about the small pinched nostrils, which, however, were modestly opaque, and decently impossible to dilate. The lips were like a couple of tight little cherries with the dew still glistening on the shining crimson skin; the shape of the face was round; the colour pure pink and white—like a monthly rose steeped in milk; and the figure which belonged to that face was small, round, plump, and desirable.

In character Clarissa was an amiable little person, with no inconvenient aspirations, nor fiery passions, no unpleasant tempers, and with a great many qualities which went well in the domestic harness, where strong individuality is as difficult to manage as vice in horses. She had almost as many friends as she had acquaintances; not a few lovers; and not one enemy. The Sicilians liked and admired her, and the English had a kind of national pride in her prettiness and amiability. She was one who would never bring the national name into discredit, and who could be quoted as a meritorious example of Anglo-Saxon training. She might have been married scores of times since her sixteenth birthday, and she had wished to have been, perhaps a dozen. But her parents had resolutely denied her to all natives. They were English to the back-bone; in the place but not of it; and they could not admit the idea of a son-in-law who was not English like themselves. So, as none of the marriageable men in the English colony had as yet come forward, and only Sicilians had demanded her hand, Clarissa Stewart was a flower still ungathered, and the fairy prince who alone would be held good enough for her had not yet appeared to claim her.

Ione, too, was fair; but how different was her tone



from her adopted sister's well-regulated harmonies! Tall and slender, she had the supple grace of movement of a panther or a leopardess. Her red-gold hair, which looked as if the sun had got entangled in it, glistened like metal, but did not shine like silk. It fell no lower than her shoulders, and was one mass of rebellious curls and arbitrary, disobedient, unmanageable ends. No brushing could make it smooth; no fixture keep it straight; no pins confine it long within bounds. Fasten it as she would, before half an hour had passed it had set itself free from all its restraints, and had broken into a turbulent kind of aureole about her head, and into a mazy tangled curtain over her forehead, falling to her eyes. Those vagrant hairpins were veritable apples of discord in the family; and on nothing was Mrs. Stewart more severe than on the sheaves which she and Clarissa were always gathering up from the sofas and the floors.

But what eyes they were which the broad white lids concealed, and that rebellious fringe of hair overshadowed! Green in some lights; hazel shot with orange in others; sometimes angry as a stormy night, then radiant as a sunny day; sometimes with the pupil dilated so that the iris was nothing but a line of yellowish red; and sometimes shown as a mere streak of glittering colour from between the narrowed lids and long dark lashes—they were eyes which spoke as eloquently as words. But they were eyes which you could not look at steadily when they looked at you, for the strange fascination which oppressed and the subtle domination which overpowered. The brows above were thick and broad, and as straight as if ruled by a line. They were many shades darker than

the hair, as were the long upturned lashes, which were like spreading flower-rays about the lids. The nose was smaller than Clarissa's and not so well shaped in profile; and the nostrils were open, thin, transparent, palpitating—according to Mrs. Stewart, almost indelicate. The lips were full and wide, but too pale for perfect beauty; and about the whole mouth was a look of cruelty, which you saw at first sight and afterwards forgot.

The complexion was a low soft cream-colour, running into the gold of the hair where this fringed the broad low brow and curled in gracious little rings about the nape of the neck; and the skin was thicker than Clarissa's. It had none of that rose-leaf bloom, that clear transparency, that pretty tracery of blue veins, like a finely-lined network under the fair flesh, which were such marked features with the elder girl. Neither was it skin that blushed under excitement, whether of pain or pleasure. On the contrary, it had the trick of turning pale when anything touched the heart, stirred the imagination, or woke the lightly slumbering passions of the girl whose nature was like nothing so much as that grand old mountain whose head they could see on clear days—that Etna with its heart of fire ever ready to break forth in active storm and desolating tempest. And that cream-white face which passion turned to deathly pallor, those dilating nostrils and those flexible pale lips, with the eyes which were apparently of all colours and as changeful in expression as in hue, were more eloquent as evidences of feeling than all Clarissa's crimson flushes and tearful or it might be dancing eyes, and red lips frankly pouting or as frankly laughing. The

face altogether was of the most beautiful type of Saracenic-Sicilian; and the colour was that strange warm whiteness of one of a dark race, who has fallen by chance on amber for pearl, and on ivory for milk. It was something entirely *sui generis*, and could scarcely be classified; but it was a face which once seen could never be forgotten, and which you would either love or hate, admire or shrink from, according to your own idiosyncrasies.

The hands were large, white, well-shaped, with long taper fingers, transparent nails, and a flattened, rather hard, and always burning palm. Clarissa's were round, pink, soft, small, dimpled, and always moist. Though Ione's hands were beautiful in shape, few people admired them, and no one could perhaps say why. Certainly an adept in palmistry had once said roughly: "They are cruel!" But even Mrs. Stewart had put her disclaimer on this, though Clarissa had looked grave as if there were something in it, and Captain Stewart had glanced up sharply from beneath his eyebrows, with one of those searching looks of his which few people could bear unmoved.

Ione was one of those few. Looking first at the hand-reader, and then at her adopted father, she said, in her hardest and most defiant way:

"Yes, that is quite true. I could be as cruel as anything you like—as a tigress if you like—if I had reason to be so—if anyone wronged me or one I loved."

"Do not give yourself a worse character than you deserve, Ione," said Mrs. Stewart gravely; while Clarissa added quickly: "I believe you could be, Nony, as cruel as a tigress, as you say, if you were roused;"

and Captain Stewart asked in his lazy way: "What kind of wrong, Io?"

"Anything that interfered with my rights," she said.

"Your rights!" said Mrs. Stewart with weak sarcasm.

"Have I none, mamma," asked the girl. "Am I not like every one else? Have I no rights like the rest?"

"Who has any, Io?" asked Captain Stewart. "Our rights are only those which we can win and hold for ourselves. They do not come by nature."

"Yes, they do," said Ione doggedly. "We all have some rights. We have the right to live and to be loved," she added boldly; "and the right to the constancy of those whom we love."

"Not a very profitable subject for a girl to discuss, Ione, nor a very lady-like sentiment at any time," said Mrs. Stewart coldly; and the conversation dropped, after Ione had fired off, as her parting shot: "It is not improper, mamma, because it is natural; and I do not care whether it is lady-like or not—it is true."

Here, then, was the central point of Ione's character and the core of her discontent—her craving for that love which she held to be her right and which she knew that she did not possess; and the fiery jealousy, the arbitrary tyranny of possession, which burnt in her heart like a consuming flame.

As a last contrast, it may be said that Ione looked as if the abounding fulness of life, the all-pervading electricity that possessed her, would have made her energetic, restless, and as impatient of inactivity as she was of restraint. But in habit she was silent, inactive,

indolent; while Clarissa, who had no such reserve-fund of latent force, was talkative, good-natured, mildly energetic, and notably industrious. Without Ione's natural intelligence, she had more application; and though her thoughts were like birds with broken wings, unable to rise from the ground of everyday life, while Ione's went careering into space, bold and fearless in their flight, still the one were as those useful fowl which lay eggs and serve the family table, while the other were as eagles which keep the flocks and broods in fear, and the appearance of which is ever a signal for defence and opposition. The practical result was that Clarissa knew three things to Ione's one, and was by far the more agreeable, the more useful, and the better informed of the two.

This, then, was the family to whom Armine St. Claire, taking with him his letter of introduction from Edward Formby, set out one afternoon to leave that and his card, wondering what fortune would befall him after.

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## CHAPTER XII.

## VILLA CLARISSA.

It was more like the set scene of an opera than anything of real life—prosaic, unpicturesque, humdrum, as we know it in our practical old land of coal-fires and east-winds. The broad double flight of steps, lozenge shaped, leading on the outside to the “piano nobile;” the fountain in the court below, where the boy ever bestrode the dolphin and the dolphin ever spouted water that made rainbows in the sun; the statues in the niches; winter though it was according to the solstice, the verdure of the evergreens, and the scent of English spring and early summer flowers, which mocked the seasons and deranged all the ordering of the zodiac; the bougainvillea flushing the walls and the Banksia roses shedding their petals over the heliotrope and mignonnette; the pigeons cooing on the roof; the peacocks screaming in the garden; the two pretty girls standing by the fountain in the sun—the taller erect, holding a canary on her finger, while the shorter, bending so as to bring her face in line with the bird, chirped and held out her hand to coax the creature to herself; the big dogs lying on the gravel; a bright-eyed, dark-skinned, bare-footed boy laughing and showing his teeth, as he watched this little drama with the familiarity of a slave whom no indulgence can lift out of his servile condition—all

was so strange, so beautiful, so unlike the life of winter either in France or England, that Armine halted at the gate to look at this living picture as he might have looked at an operatic *mise en scène*, loath to ring the bell which was to give him ingress and bring him back to real life.

How beautiful those two girls were, each in her own way; yet how unlike was the one from the other! That tall, slender, graceful creature was dressed like a sixteenth-century picture—her colours old-gold and green. The shorter was of more correct modern intention, but her rather hard blue gown looked like a copy of metropolitan fashions made by a local milliner who had more confidence in her ideas than diffidence in her method. And Armine, as became the woman-worshipper he was, had keen eyes for all the details of feminine adornment and attire. A high frill about her throat, slashed sleeves, and a girdle round her waist, made that tall girl like a memory rather than a present fact; and something in her face seemed to take her back to the ages of long-ago, as if she had been Catherine de Medicis before she had felt her power and learned to sin, or Lucrezia Borgia with her fair hair glistening in the sun, and the dread qualities of that Aqua Tofana as yet unproved. But her companion, all over little “kiltings” and superfluous bows of ribbons, was emphatically of the present day—as far removed from crime as from poetry, from tragedy as from heroism.

Armine watched them for a few seconds, and saw, with a certain odd satisfaction, that the bird did not leave the hand of the one for all the invitation of the other. It fluttered its golden wings and chirped back

its cheery note of refusal; then finally flew up to the shoulder of the one who seemed to be its mistress, as if to end by a decisive protest a scene of unwelcome temptation.

"You little darling!" said the girl in a caressing voice, taking the bird off her shoulder and pressing it against her face with fondness. Then a fierce light blazed up into her eyes as she said in a curiously harsh voice: "But I would have killed you if you had left me!"

"For shame, Nony! you jealous, passionate, cruel thing!" said the shorter girl with temper.

On which St. Claire rang the bell, and a shuffling old woman, whom he had not seen crouching on the ground inside the gate, slowly raised herself, like an animated bundle of rags, and drew the bolt to let him pass.

As he entered, she furtively crossed herself and spat on the ground. This stranger, with his soft, dark, melancholy eyes, pale face and clear-cut handsome features—so like the pictures of the Christ in all but the traditional colouring, that even old Concetta saw the resemblance—he was only a heretic like the rest, and one whose baleful influence had to be exorcised by the divine grace of holy saints in heaven.

Both girls turned to look at the visitor; and then Clarissa ran into the house to warn her mother, as girls of a certain stamp always do. But Ione stood her ground, looking at the new-comer from under her dropped lids while seeming to be apparently occupied only with her bird. As he came nearer she raised her head and opened her eyes on him with a sudden



swift, and almost dazzling flash, which made him feel as if he had been lightly struck across his eyes.

Standing there like some fearless creature of the woods and wilds at gaze, nothing on earth could have been more unlike Monica Barrington than was this slender girl, with her flashing eyes and panther-like grace, her strange commingling of Eastern modelling with Western colouring, her look of lightly slumbering and easily awakened passion, of desperate resolve when roused, of jealous tenacity when won. But to those who are in love everything is like the beloved. Art is the symbol, nature the garment; all charm has the same savour, all beauty bears the same impress; life and eternity are interpenetrated with the one thought, the one spirit, and love transforms to itself every circumstance and every association.

Something, he knew not what, in the pose, the lines of the girl before him, perhaps in the colour of her gown, perhaps in the way in which she held her head, her hand—something, no matter what—reminded Armine of Monica; and that sweet dreamy face, as he saw it when they had met in the garden and understood each other only too plainly, seemed to look at him through Ione's, like a spirit faintly outlined in the moonlight, or like that moon itself when hanging like a cloud in the daylight sky. This strange mixture of the East and West—this woman with her panther-like grace and flashing eyes, who involuntarily suggested Lucrezia Borgia and Catherine de Medicis—also reminded him of that mild and tender lily-lady, with whom dreams stood for realities and regret was the strongest form of passion.

Love parts with no fantasies. Once created, they

remain till they crystallize by repetition. No one on the outside ever knows how much a sudden and apparently inexplicable liking for one is due to this kind of vague resemblance to another. For after we have gone through our first youth, when alone our emotions are new and fresh, life ceases to be original, and love itself is more often repetition, remembrance, suggestion, than deliberate choice of irresistible sympathy.

Her eyes, still wide open, with that strange electric light within them as they looked into his—soft, tender, humid, loving, because full of the thought of Monica—Ione took two steps to meet St. Claire, as he, still shaken by his strange confusion of perception and remembrance, went slowly forward to where she stood.

“Do you want papa?—Captain Stewart?” she asked in English.

Her voice was penetrating and vibrating, but neither musical nor sympathetic.

“I came to leave my card and a letter of introduction,” said Armine with a slight smile.

The abrupt directness of her address, at once so graceful and so unconventional, roused him from himself and interested him.

“What letter?” she asked.

“From a friend of his and mine—Edward Formby,” he answered.

“Then you had better come into the house,” said Ione. “It will give papa less trouble than if you leave your card and he has to go into Palermo to find you out, as people generally do. Come with me.”

“Thank you,” said St. Claire with pleasure.

At this moment a swarthy, Moorish, almost negroid-looking man, with glittering eyes, a flat nose, pro-

truding jaw and high cheek-bones, passed with a lounging kind of step under the arcade formed by the double flight of steps. He came apparently from nowhere, rounding the angle of the house like a shadow, as dark and as noiseless. He was not barefooted, like the boy, but his shoes were of some soft material which deadened the sound of his footsteps so that he made no more noise than a cat creeping by the wall.

"Vincenzo! where is papa?" asked Ione in Sicilian.

"At the mill, Signorina," he answered, uncovering his head and showing a shock of curly twisted hair, of the same quality as her own, but dead-black where hers was living gold.

"Ask him to come to the house," said Ione. "An English gentleman has a letter from a friend and wants to see him."

She spoke in a curt abrupt way, without the faintest pretence of courtesy; but the man was respectful to servility, and smiled as if the very insolence of her bearing conferred on him favour and honour. All the same, his eyes were bold, and seemed to take her in too completely for a servant—to express too much admiration—to confess her womanhood too openly—in view of the different positions in which they stood and the respect due from him and owing to her. So at least it seemed to St. Claire. But then he did not understand Italian eyes; and Ione, who was evidently haughty enough for a young queen, did not seem to see what he saw, and certainly not to resent what half-annoyed him.

"Come up to the drawing-room," she then said to Armine. "You can see mamma till papa comes from the mill."

"Thank you," repeated St. Claire, thinking the whole affair somewhat of an adventure and more than pleasant. His fancy and imagination both were excited, and the gentle kind of artistry, which was one of his characteristics, had food enough in the girl, the scene, the circumstances—all of which were so novel and so beautiful, so stimulating and so suggestive.

He followed Ione up the wide double flight of steps into a lofty hall, with frescoed walls, painted ceiling, and smooth blue shining tiles for the marbled paper, uneventful whitewash, and moss-patterned carpets of home; through several rooms of unspecified character; and so to the last of all—a pretty drawing-room, filled with flowers and pictures, English books and English ornaments, and yet for all these national addenda, not like an English room of native growth.

It was less luxurious and more brightly coloured; less complete in its conditions and more scattered in its arrangement; evidently more adapted as a refuge from the heat of the day than as a comfortable retreat in the long dark winter evenings. And such home circumstances as were retained had somehow a transplanted look, as if out of place, and not in harmony with the true *genius loci*. Still, it was more home-like than the hotel.

Here sat Mrs. Stewart, a fair, plump, not to say obese, little woman, like Clarissa grown older, with tints of blue and yellow for the pure overlay of milk and roses, and fully completed circles for the younger woman's slighter curves. But, unlike Clarissa, a discontented expression was stereotyped on her round face, as if she were one who had been hardly dealt with by fate and who could not forget her griefs. It

might be that she was unhappy because she was in delicate health; because her husband had been obliged to leave his place and all the social consideration that went with it; because she had had no son to inherit; or because she was discontented with her servants. Chi lo sa? Whatever the cause, the result was undeniable; she was evidently a woman with a grievance, who pitied herself and protested, impotent to prevent.

But she was gentle if fretful, and especially kind to those of her compatriots who brought letters of introduction from England. She had never really taken to the Sicilians; and her hospitality to her own was partly because of her want of affection for those who were not her own.

Such as she was, she received Dr. St. Claire with cordiality, and expressed her pleasure at seeing a friend of her husband's friend, Edward Formby; whom, however, she knew only by name, and of whom she asked innumerable questions, after the manner of those to whom personal details are the most interesting things in life. She had a trick of sighing and casting up her eyes when she spoke, which was not conducive to cheerfulness; and she had always that queer self-pitying air which has been noted above. The contrast between her exuberance of physical outline and persistent melancholy of manner was almost comical from its incongruity and misfitting oddity, and the first questions which every one asked about Mrs. Stewart were: What is the matter with her? and, Why is she so unhappy?

Presently Captain Stewart came in. A tall, lean, angular man, with a quiet manner, a slow utterance, a

monotonous voice, speaking little, generally resting in sloping, lazy attitudes, on slight acquaintance he might have passed for indolent and apathetic; deeper knowledge revealed the dogged determination, inexhaustible energy, and that quiet courage of the practical and unimaginative nature which knows no fear and acknowledges no danger, by which he had made his way and held it in Palermo during the most lawless and disturbed times. The backbone of his character was respect for himself, his caste, his country, his religion, branching out into illimitable contempt for all foreigners of every nationality, and for all people of lower social grade than his own.

He was a man to whom those in his employ were always "those fellows," and sometimes "these ruffians of mine." But he did his duty by them for all that he looked on them as little better than our ancestral savages, or our poor relations the apes. He gave them hard words and good wages, and spent his strength in trying, as he said, to hammer some kind of principle into them by rebuke, exhortation, scorn, and honesty for his own part. He said it was heartless work, and that he knew any one of them—even Vincenzo—would buy and sell him before his eyes for sixpence; yes, even Vincenzo, the overseer at the mill, and the deepest of all in his confidence and respect.

It is but fair to add that Captain Stewart would have said the same of any working-men, English or other. It was not only because they were foreigners that he despised them, but because they were his social inferiors; though certainly, being foreigners did add a finer flavour to his disdain and made him ascribe to nationality much that was due to human nature.

For his patriotism was of that robustly ideal kind which consists in calling every kind of trickiness and vice "un-English;" so that, to be English was, according to him, to possess all the virtues in a lump while alien to all the vices—to be one of a nation where every man is honest, brave, pure-hearted and true, and every woman unselfish, tender, domestic, and chaste.

If this was his state of mind with respect to his servants and workmen, he was no more liberal to the gentry. For it was part of his very constitution to believe that no man out of England understood more than the first rudiments of refinement or morality; and, seeing that he held all differences as evidences of our superiority and the inferiority of those others, the balance was never in want of a weight and the register had always some deficiency to record.

"Glad to see you," he said to St. Claire, as he came into the room with that long slow stride which on a mountain-side we call "slogging." "Glad to see any friend of Formby's," he added, glancing at the letter which Armine had sent him by Vincenzo, and which he held open in his hand. "How long have you been here? and how long do you stay?" he continued, subsiding into a chair where he sat all askew, with his long legs thrust out in two straight parallel lines, like a flying stork's.

"I have been here about three weeks, and I stay till April," answered Armine.

"And then make the giro?"

"Yes; then I go round the island."

"The usual thing!" said Captain Stewart with a satirical smile. "All you tourist fellows do the same thing—like mill horses."

He forgot the time when he had been a tourist fellow himself and had gone the round like the rest. But then that was in the old days, when visitors to Sicily were scarce; and our own experience is always respectable, where that of others is ridiculous.

"I suppose we do. We all have naturally the same wish to see Girgenti and Syracuse; and as the circumstances are invariable and the places immovable, we must follow in each other's footsteps," answered Armine with simplicity of self-defence, not meaning a snub.

Ione lifted her eyelids and half-smiled as she glanced rapidly at the new-comer. She was the only one who caught the snub; but then she was the only one on the look-out for stings, and undutifully rejoiced when they came.

"And what have you done since you came?" continued Captain Stewart. "Seen the chapel, of course, and Monreale?"

"Yes; I have pretty well done the city and environs," said Armine, falling into the trick of tongue common to sightseers.

"And now you are tired of stones and want society, eh?"

"I suppose so," said St. Claire, smiling.

"I see you look peaky, and Formby says you have broken down," said Captain Stewart, again referring to his letter as to a brief. "The air here will set you to rights in no time, and we will pull you straight if you go wrong."

"Thank you," said Armine, looking at Mrs. Stewart.

"How do you like Palermo, Dr. St. Claire?" asked that lady with a sigh.

"Greatly," he answered.



She looked at him with a plaintive smile to match her husband's satirical one; Clarissa turned on him a beaming face, as if he had advocated her cause; and Ione again raised her strange eyes with that sudden flash which dazzled and bewildered him, and seemed like a light blow across his own eyes.

"It is a pretty place—for a short time," said Mrs. Stewart, in the tone of one making a generous concession.

"Terribly behind-hand and dead-alive," put in her husband.

"The scenery is beautiful, and some of the architecture is very fine," said Armine.

"Which don't make up for the want of energy, honesty, and progress," drawled the Captain.

"You have been here for many years, have you not?" asked St. Claire.

Mrs. Stewart looked forlorn and oppressed.

"Ah, yes!" she said, in the tone of a German who murmurs "Ach Himmel!"

"Worse luck, yes," said Captain Stewart, shrugging his shoulders, but speaking with philosophic cheerfulness.

"Poor dear Palermo, I am sure it is very nice!" said Clarissa affectionately.

"England is nicer," said Ione abruptly.

"My dear child, how do you know?" asked Mrs. Stewart with melancholy remonstrance. "You have never been in England—how can you form any opinion of its merits?"

"I know it is," answered Ione tenaciously.

"It is about right for once," said Captain Stewart; and St. Claire smiled his assent.

"Yes," he said; "if we have not the beautiful skies and flowers of Sicily, we have some other things which are perhaps more valuable and more essential to the well-being of a nation."

"Of course we have!" said Ione triumphantly, identifying herself with the cradle wherein she had never laid her curly head.

"Just so," said Captain Stewart approvingly, accustomed for his own part to these commonplaces. "That is where the whole thing lies."

"Yes," sighed Mrs. Stewart; and "Yes" repeated St. Claire for chorus.

"But the climate!" objected Clarissa, with a little shudder. "There is no sun in England, and it is always raining."

"Oh! the climate is absurdly exaggerated," said Captain Stewart. "Take the good with the bad, all round, there are many worse climates than that of Old England."

"There are more days in the year when a man can be out of doors without inconvenience—more hours in the week when he can work—than in any other country in Europe," said St. Claire.

"It is a grand country, and it is free!" exclaimed Ione, with sudden enthusiasm.

"My dear child, how can you possibly know?" returned Mrs. Stewart, again reproving.

"I do know," answered Ione, as she had answered before.

"Perhaps it is too free," said Clarissa, with a little laugh.

"That is impossible," said Ione.

"No, Ione, that is very possible. And England

does give too much freedom to young women," said Mrs. Stewart, in the tone of one touching a well-worn theme and quartering beaten ground.

"Does it, Dr. St. Claire?" asked Ione, turning to Armine with a half-pathetic look of appeal.

"Not too much, because they do not make a bad use of it, else perhaps it would," temporized the handsome young doctor, looking first at Mrs. Stewart and then at the girl with a sweet little half-encouraging, half-deprecating smile for each.

And again their eyes met—his tender, humid, soft, pleading; hers mysterious, magnetic, passionate, bewildering—eyes which were not part of her personality but were the whole—eyes which, when you looked at them, made you forget all but what you saw, and which, when they looked at you, made you feel that you possessed the rest.

And for the second time something, he did not know what, in Ione, reminded St. Claire of Monica, and the suggestion seemed to bring her as close to him as if she had been the sister of the one he loved.

After this the conversation drifted naturally on to the things of Palermo; what he had seen and what he had not seen; what he admired, and how much he understood of the language, the habits, the architecture, the history; with the not very consoling inference to be drawn from these questions and his answers, that he had seen nothing in the best way; that he understood nothing in the true light; and that if he wanted to make good use of his time he must put himself under Stewartian guidance, and they would direct him aright. And then this first interview ended

with an invitation to come and lunch here to-morrow, when they would arrange some excursion which should be at once profitable and pleasant.

It was all very charming, very cheering, very strange. English in feeling, Palermitan in surroundings, the Stewarts had that odd kind of double nationality which interests the new-comer so much;—reducing the social chaos in which he finds himself to some kind of intelligible order—giving a key to all the mysteries, and making an oasis of familiarity in the desert of the unknown.

Yes, indeed, it was all very charming; and St. Claire, who had so many effeminate characteristics, felt the same kind of gratitude as is felt by the average woman when, desolate and alone, she suddenly lights on a compatriot who makes himself her protector, and henceforth feels herself championed and cared for. He was glad to have made this pleasant acquaintance. Palermo would now wear another and more friendly aspect to him, and the cure which it was to effect would be more certain and more complete.

As he drove along the upper road of La Favorita, conscious of the aromatic scents of the wild worts and the beauty of the flowers and evergreens, he was surprised to note how much lighter and less depressed he felt than usual. The dead weight of loneliness was lifted from his heart, and these good dear people had opened for him a temporary home. It would give him so much pleasure to cultivate their acquaintance! Already he liked them all, seeing each in his or her ideal. But naturally the two girls interested him most; and of the two Ione was the more sug-

gestive. She was evidently a psychological study, and she was of resplendent beauty. Why and how did she suggest Monica Barrington? Not a line of likeness really existed; and Armine did not yet see that the likeness was only in his own imagination and due simply to the fact of the all-pervading influence of memory. Still it was there, vivid enough if self-made and baseless; and because of it Ione Stewart possessed a double charm—her own and Monica's.

"A day to mark in white chalk," he said to himself as he drove up to the hotel. "And, what a strange coincidence!—it is my birthday," he added, looking to the sky just as the sun sunk down behind the noble barrier of Monte Cuccio to the west.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

“WHAT THEY INFLICT THEY FEEL.”

THE next day at the appointed hour Armine St. Claire found himself at the Villa Clarissa; that strange charm of English life in a foreign setting as keen to-day as it was yesterday, and the fascination of the whole thing as strong. And, as yesterday, he found the two girls in the court by the fountain, again with the bird between them. But this time the spirit of the scene was changed, though the framework and the actors were the same.

Clarissa, her body curved a little forward and her hands held out as if to repel her sister, stood with a flushed face, weeping violently, speaking passionately and evidently with bitter reproaches; while Ione, concentrated and deadly pale, her head bent, but her flashing eyes raised from beneath their level brows with a look of defiance and pain united, stood silent and superb, as one who has gained a victory, but at cost. Still, having gained it, she could afford to let the vanquished rave.

In her hand lay the little canary, dead—two or three drops of crimson blood staining the ruffled gold of his feathers.

“Oh, Dr. St. Claire, think what she has done—she has killed poor Mimi!” cried Clarissa, as the young doctor came through the gate.

"Killed the bird—what a pity! what a misfortune!" said St. Claire. "How did it happen?" he added, with a kind of professional interest in death as a familiar and personal circumstance which at once made him part of the affair. "How was it?" he repeated, holding out his hand for the bird—which Ione did not give him.

"She did it on purpose!" sobbed Clarissa, between grief and rage torn out of all conventional bondage and casting good-breeding and politic reticence to the winds. "She did it for jealousy, because it came to me when I called it."

"Oh no, not on purpose!" said St. Claire, in his sweet temporising way.

To a man of his gentle nature such an outburst was both abhorrent and unintelligible; and that this beautiful girl, who in the mysterious way of all-pervading love suggested Monica, should have done such a savage thing as to kill a favourite bird for jealousy of her sister, was a thing he could neither accept nor understand. It could not have been done on purpose! He was sure that she could explain away a fact which looked so black against her, and that her action would prove to be rather a misfortune, because unintentional, than a crime, because deliberate.

"On purpose!" repeated Clarissa emphatically. "On purpose; for jealousy because it came to me when I called it. She cannot deny it."

"I have no wish to deny it," said Ione proudly. "It was my bird, and it should not have left me for anyone else. It was mine. I had the right to it—I had the right to kill it if it deserted me. It was faithless; and I did kill it."

"I am very very sorry, and I do not see your right," said Dr. St. Claire gravely.

She looked at him with reproach; her blazing eyes full of passionate contempt for his tame-spirited want of sympathy. Had he been a true man, she thought in her revolt, he would have understood her feeling, and would have honoured her for the assertion of her rights.

"But it was mine," she repeated, with the monotony of those who have only feeling on which to argue and who cannot bring forward reasons. "It had no right to leave me for Clarissa. It belonged to me, and I loved it; and I was justified in killing it if it no longer loved me."

"No, you had no right over it, and you were not justified, Miss Stewart," said Armine, with more firmness than might have been expected from him, considering the man he was and the girl with whom he was dealing.

"Love gives no rights?" asked Ione with supreme contempt. "Oh! you are a cold-blooded northerner, else you could not have said that!"

"I am neither a northerner nor cold-blooded," said Armine gently. "And love does not give the right of life and death."

"Not for infidelity?"

"Not even for infidelity," he answered.

"What nonsense you talk, Ione!" said Clarissa, with the scornful accent of common-sense in the midst of hysterical exaggeration. "Infidelity!—because a little bird came to another person when it was called! One would think you were speaking of men and women—husbands and wives."



"It is all the same thing," said Ione. "It is the love, not the person. My bird was mine, and it should not have gone to you. And you are the murderess," she said, fiercely turning against Clarissa, as if she would have struck her to the earth. "It is you, with your horrid cold-blooded love of teasing, who are to blame, not me. You were the cause of it all; you are to blame!"

"No, no, Miss Stewart," said Dr. St. Claire; "you go too far there."

"It is what she always does," said Clarissa, weeping.

"Oh, come now, don't!" said St. Claire, sincerely distressed. "Your sister did not mean what she said—she could not mean it," he said soothingly to Clarissa. "You did not mean it, did you?" coaxingly to Ione.

"Yes, I did," said Ione stubbornly.

"Oh!" was the young doctor's exclamation, made in a tone of disappointment.

"You don't know Nony yet," said Clarissa with energy.

"I am sure I know her too well for that," returned Dr. St. Claire in his sweetest and most winning way.

Ione looked at him, and some of the darker passion went out of her face.

"You are angry with me?" she asked suddenly, with a shade more of softness, or rather a shade less of fierceness, in her eyes than had been there before.

"Angry? My dear Miss Stewart, it is not my business to be angry with you whatever you may do!" he said with a slight smile.

"But you are, whether it is your business or not," she answered.

"I am sorry," was his rejoinder.

"Which is the same thing under a different name—the pill sugared," returned Ione bitterly.

"Anyone would be sorry and angry too, Nony, who was not such a monster of cruelty and jealousy as you are," said Clarissa vehemently. "You are not fit for civilised life—you are nothing but a savage!" she added.

"No, no, no! neither a savage nor a monster, Miss Stewart," said Armine, trying to speak lightly. "But I am sorry she is so jealous—and very sorry the poor little bird is dead."

"He should not have left me for Clarissa," said Ione sullenly.

Dr. St. Claire shook his head.

"It was a small offence for which to cut short its happy life," he said gravely.

For a moment Ione's eyes flashed with impatient pride, like a sneer and a reproach flung into the young doctor's face; then they fell suddenly to the ground, while a strange and nameless something stole softly over her own. It was strange and nameless even to Clarissa, who knew the varied lights and shadows of that expressive countenance so well; for, with all its swift changes, it rarely showed tenderness, remorse, or shame—and it was tender, remorseful, and ashamed now.

"I am sorry my bird is dead; and that I can never love it again," she said softly, a faint quiver passing over her lips.

Then the gentler mood passed as quickly as it had

come, and she raised her eyes again full of defiance into St. Claire's, while she stiffened her neck till it became like a column of stubbornness and pride.

"But he was mine; and it was a crime for him to leave me for anyone else—to love anyone but me. And I had the right to kill him if he did. And I did kill him," she said, setting her lips into a thin line and breathing hard through her palpitating nostrils.

"You are a cruel, wicked, jealous girl, and you will never come to any good," said Clarissa for her final fling, as they heard the voice of Captain Stewart coming through the garden, summoned by that marvellous telegraphy of looks and signs by which southern Italians are told all they wish to know and tell all they wish to have known. "And I will tell both father and mother what you have done," she added; "and then you will see what they will say."

"I do not care what they say," said Ione with stubborn pride. "It was your fault for enticing my bird from me. He was mine and he ought not to have left me. If it happened again I would do the same—I would kill him," she added in her hardest, most tenacious, most desperate manner.

At this moment Captain Stewart rounded the corner of the house; Mrs. Stewart came down the outside steps; and the conversation passed from the bird to St. Claire—How he found himself to-day? What had he done this morning? Was not Pellegrino looking magnificent? Had he ever seen the sea so enchanting? and, Was not the day absolutely perfect?

But on this Mrs. Stewart said, with the plaintive discontent of one ever on the look-out for flaws and seamy sides—one who has outlived all illusions:

"No, not quite perfect, Ralph; there is a point of scirocco in it."

After these necessary preliminaries had been gone through, Clarissa broke out with the story of her sister's iniquity; and, for all the presence of the stranger-guest, Ione was severely scolded by Mrs. Stewart, and sermonised with more effect but in fewer words by her adopted father. Yet St. Claire, in spite of his constitutional dislike to think ill of others, could not help feeling that Clarissa told the news rather to get Ione into disgrace than for righteous indignation at the wrong itself. It was a stone put into her hand by Ione against herself, and it was only too easy to adjust the sling. Accordingly it was adjusted, and the blow was delivered with telling force.

The severest thing, however, that was said or done was when Captain Stewart, taking the girl's burning hand and forcibly opening it, flicked with his forefinger a drop of blood that had come on the palm from the bleeding bird.

"Eh?" he said, drily. "That hand-reading fellow said it was cruel. He did not go quite so far as to say it would commit murder."

"And would again," said Ione, defiantly.

Vincenzo, the swarthy Saracenic-looking head of the mill, was standing by Captain Stewart, just that one step in the rear which marked his inferior position—standing bare-headed in the sun, no one bidding him be covered, till Ione suddenly ordered him to put on his hat, as a sign of grace to him which meant rebuke to the rest. St. Claire, preoccupied and disturbed, had forgotten to return his salute, and, after Ione's abrupt command, the man stood there with no

more attention paid to his presence than if he had been a slave or an animal. With the quickness of his race, however, he seemed to have understood all that had taken place; and, with the ready sympathy which accompanies that quickness, to have identified himself with the matter on hand, though he himself was of no account in it.

In a clear, unembarrassed voice, but with almost servile devotion of manner, he said to Ione, as if it were a solatium that he was offering:

"I will make a little coffin for your bird, Signorina, and we will bury him among the flowers."

Captain Stewart looked at the man sharply, but Mrs. Stewart said, with a kindly smile, addressing St. Claire, while glancing at Vincenzo:

"He is such a good fellow, this Vincenzo! He always brings us flowers on Sunday, because he knows that Sunday is a holy day with us—not a mere festa, as with them, poor wretches!—and he wishes to honour it for our sakes. We have a fairly well-managed garden, as you see; though I must say I do not think it is equal to its cost—seeing what we spend on it, it ought to be a thousand times better," she put in, parenthetically, with her usual accent of displeased discontent; "but Vincenzo manages to get flowers far superior to any that we have. I do not know where he goes for them; and he ought to tell us, but he will not; which is very wrong of him. Still, it is nice of him to bring them to us as he does. It is a graceful little attention, and shows that he appreciates all that we have done for him. For without us he would have starved in the streets," she added, with that curious acrimony sometimes seen in generous people, when

recounting their good deeds, and half-angry with those whom they have served.

All this time Vincenzo stood with a smiling face, bright, swarthy, glittering, looking from Mrs. Stewart to Dr. St. Claire, and from them to the others, in that unfocussed way of ignorant participation proper to a sympathetic man, who does not understand what is being said, but who, hearing his own name, makes sure that it is something pleasant and friendly.

"Does he speak English?" asked St. Claire.

"No. Poor creatures, they are so benighted!" replied Mrs. Stewart. "They know absolutely nothing—no English—nothing of the Bible; you cannot call them Christians; indeed they are half savages."

"No, mamma, Vincenzo it not a savage. He is a gentleman by birth, and as good as we are," said Ione, suddenly. "He cannot help being a Roman Catholic, if that is what you mean by being benighted. He was born so."

"Don't speak to mother like that, Nony," said Clarissa, sharply.

Vincenzo shifted his feet and took off his cap, which he twisted round and round in his hand. He was smiling as he had been smiling all the while; but the expression on his face was somehow different from what it had been; and once, when he looked at Ione, when no one watched him, his eyes were like burning coals—but not fierce nor unfriendly.

"He must have Saracenic blood in him," said St. Claire, critical and professional.

"That is self-evident," said Captain Stewart. "He is a good fellow for what he is—the least of a scoundrel

of any I have about me; but he is an uncommonly ugly dog I must admit."

"Yes; he is no beauty," laughed St. Claire.

And then Vincenzo lifted his coal-black, deep-set, shining eyes into the young doctor's face and smiled benignly. He evidently imagined that St. Claire had said something that was complimentary and pleasant.

After this they all turned with the master, and went through the garden to the mill, which was at a little distance from the house. Their way led through hedges of monthly roses in the full perfection of their waxen bloom and delicate perfume; by large shrubs of broad-leaved fragrant geraniums, not yet in flower; by miniature trees of glossy-leaved myrtle; by agaves and aloes and palms—giving a strangely tropical character to the whole scene; by groves of oranges and silver-dusted olives; by impenetrable hedges, living walls, of huge prickly-pear, or cactus, or fichi d'India, as it may best please one to call those rude amorphous growths which are so like great vegetable beasts—beasts mutilated, wounded, torn, dismembered, yet surviving all ill-treatment by dint of strength and patience, and doing to the last, in spite of torture and ill-usage, their life's work of producing delicate and dainty fruit. Those poor ill-used and all-enduring vegetable beasts!—they are nearly as pathetic as the tortured "ciuci" of Castellammare!

How different it all was from anything to be seen in England! How much more luxuriant, how much more poetic, and how much less complete and orderly! Villa Clarissa was noted for its good management, but it would not have borne comparison with an English estate tilled by English hands; and the general look

of loose-lying ends and unfinished bits everywhere, like vacant spaces in a mosaic, would have grieved the scul of a high-farming landowner. Here the marvel was, not the vacant spaces, but those filled in and perfected. Such as it was, however, it was very picturesque, very novel, rich and lovely; and St. Claire forgot the weeds in the flowers and the partial disorder in the general profusion.

So, passing through this odd kind of enchanted ground, where wonders might have taken place as of the established order of things, they reached at last the mill to which they were bound, and whereof Vincenzo was the accredited overseer.

Half-a-dozen men were lounging about the place, doing a little here and a little there, in that desultory unmethodical way which seems to be more play than work and more pretence than reality. One moved a sack a few inches farther to the side, as it would appear quite unnecessarily and more as if to mask idleness than to do real work. Another examined with close attention the empty hoppers, which were protected against the wiles of the Evil One by a picture of the Madonna pasted against the upright. A third lazily rubbed the flour between his fingers; a fourth seemed to find a grave problem in the material of which the sack was made. But when the master and his party came in, even these perfunctory little activities ceased, and all grouped themselves about the sacks and columns of the hall, each man, with the unconscious grace of his nation, making a picture or representing a statue.

All seemed to turn as if involuntarily to Ione. The master was the master, whose favour represented



the bread and wine and oil of their homes; the mistress was the mistress whose grace gave extra gratuities to fill the gaps made by the hand of the Church and the cursed ill-chance of the lotto; but that younger Signorina, that fair-haired girl, who was as if one of them and yet was not—she was the flower they all admired, the shrine at which they all worshipped, the cynosure of all their bold black roving eyes, the uncrowned queen to whom all their fervent and ideal loyalty was devoted. From Vincenzo to that young lad of sixteen, lounging with the grace of a forest animal and the unconscious dignity of a red Indian across a sack, and devouring Ione with his eyes, all turned to her as naturally as Mohammedans to their far-off Mecca, as Sabians to the sun.

To Clarissa came none of this ardent devotion. She had not that electric quality, that magnetic power, possessed in such abundance by Ione. She was just a nice little plump white human pigeon to them—no more; but Ione was the young goddess whom each man secretly loved as a woman, yet scarcely wished to find less than divine.

The girl seemed to feel her position as the untitled queen of all these unsworn subjects, for she was superb in her easy consciousness of power—her strange eyes flashing now on one now on another as she silently gathered up their homage and secretly returned encouragement. In that uncongenial life of home, where she was always as if in disgrace and somewhat under chastisement, it pleased her to feel that here, among her adopted father's men, she was supreme, and that, lowly as it might be, she had an empire which no one could invade. To a woman a

sceptre is always a sceptre; and, in default of gold and ivory, one of humble reeds or woodland flowers is better than none at all.

To-day the girl's fascination for these men seemed to be increased. Perhaps the mysterious force of her nature had gained in strength from the sin that she had committed and the passion that had possessed her. Who knows? We have not yet sounded all the depths of human nature; and we do not know the full meaning of those words we use so glibly—Spiritual influence. Be that as it may, this spiritual influence always exercised by Ione over her father's men was to-day more potent even than usual. Vincenzo had told the whole story by a few gestures and glances as he came into the mill; and each man and boy lounging there knew, as he looked, that in the long white hand so closely clasped the little bird lay dead; and that Ione, who loved it, had killed it from jealousy and out of regard for her rights. They knew and sympathised and secretly adored her more than before. "She is one of us," they said among themselves. Daughter as she was of that cold and distant England, where the sun never shines, where no flowers bloom and no fruits ripen, she was nevertheless one of them.

And yet she, who seemed born for the life of the fervid South, was a passionate lover of England, that unknown but to her ideal land of individual rights and female liberty; while Clarissa, who physically and by character was English to her finger-tips, cared for no place but Sicily and never wished to leave Palermo.

By looks and signs the story of Ione's jealousy and revenge had been told by Vincenzo to all the men at

the mill. By looks and signs too, the new-comer was discussed—and pronounced a man of no account. He was to be ranked with Clarissa and human pigeons; but he was not of the height and stature of Ione, their queen. They need not trouble themselves about him. To be sure he was one of that powerful nation whose supremacy they had to acknowledge in their padrone; but he was only a poor creature for all his soft eyes and that strange beauty of face which was of the type that painters have taken for St. John or the Christ. And they, the fiery children of the South, with the living sun in their veins, had the right to despise him as one of the traditional "machines" of his race.

And thus, before his face, unseen and undetected, went round from each to each a whole litany of contempt; and the stranger was relegated to the limbo of the despised. Monica had wept for him in the solitude of her chamber—Monica, the sweetest flower and purest growth of womanhood; but these wild and ignorant Sicilian peasants ridiculed and contemned him and ranked him below a girl as wild, as passionate, and nearly as ignorant, as themselves.

The visit to the mill over, they all went back to the house, where the luncheon was English in design and Sicilian in execution—like the translation of a ballad into terza rima. But it pleased St. Claire, disposed to be pleased with everything at the Villa Clarissa. He felt as if he should get well and strong now. Yesterday and to-day had given him a lift onward—such a sensitive and impressionable creature as he was, and so painfully under the influence of his imagination and affections!

The only thing that disturbed the absolute enjoy-

ment of the hour was the anomalous position which Ione seemed to hold in the family. A daughter, like Clarissa, there was yet the most undeniable if subtle difference made between her and her sister. Where the one was listened to with that kind of respect which springs from love, the other was contradicted and opposed with the chronic contempt of chronic displeasure. Where the one seemed to be in the full sunshine of favour, the other was evidently in the cold shade of mild disgrace. Even the very speech and manner of the girls themselves was different, for where Clarissa called her parents father and mother, Ione said papa and mamma; where Clarissa kissed and fondled each by turn, to receive back as much as she gave, Ione never laid her hand on either, nor was she caressed more than she herself caressed. And St. Claire wondered why there was this strange discrepancy of spirit and bearing, and why the younger daughter was always spoken to in the reproving manner of one under enduring chastisement. What had she done?—How had she offended that she should be thus rebuffed? He admired her immensely; did she not suggest Monica Barrington?—if only in that evasive way of false likenesses and imaginative suggestions, which vanish as you examine them till at last the first impression becomes merely a memory and no longer a fact—still, did she not suggest Monica?

Nevertheless, despite all his admiration, all his sympathy, he was sorry that she had killed the bird. The act which had roused for her the ardent admiration of the men at the mill, had saddened him. He could not say that it had revolted him. His repulsion was not so strong as that; but it had shocked and

made him sorry. All the same, he did not like to hear her spoken to as if under perpetual chastisement and in enduring if mild disgrace; and he wondered how such manifestly kind people as the Stewarts had the heart to do it.

After a time Ione, who had lapsed into absolute silence, sitting by the window and looking out on the garden as if dreaming with her eyes open, got up and left the room, and St. Claire saw her no more. It came to be time for him to leave, but still she did not appear; and he had to bid the family farewell without including her. As he went through the court she suddenly appeared from under the archway of the outer staircase and came up to him, almost as if she had watched for him. And yet, it had been only by chance that he had not been accompanied to the gate according to the sweet and hospitable fashion of the place; in which case watching for him, to have a word with him alone, would have been a needless trouble.

"Good-bye," she said, offering her hand. "I want to say I am sorry I killed the bird."

"Thank you. I am glad that you have said this," said St. Claire fervently. "God bless you!"

"You are very good—very very good," said Ione looking into his face, her dilated eyes as dark as night. "I feel that you will understand me."

Then she turned away, and in a moment she had gone.

"She has conscience and a heart," said St. Claire to himself as he passed through the gate, his own heart considerably the lighter for this philanthropic relief. "I am glad she is a good girl after all!"

As he thought this, Vincenzo, lounging with his

noiseless step along the sunny side of the garden-wall, came up to the carriage, the door of which he opened, while he took off his cap with a smile.

"Thank you," said St. Claire a little brusquely.

The man inspired him with a certain horror, and for the life of him he could not be suave and sweet as he generally was.

There was no smile on the Sicilian's face as he looked after the carriage and made a significant movement with his hand—no smile, but a scowl that made the blazing fire of his eyes yet more potent, as he peered through the bars of the gate and saw Ione, with a dead-white face and tears in her eyes, standing motionless by the fountain, the dead bird in her relaxed hand, while she looked at the falling water, conscious of only one thought, one feeling: "I am glad I confessed I was sorry—glad that he was pleased with me and said God bless you!"

Then Vincenzo came through the gate and went up to her.

"Shall I make the little coffin, Signorina?" he said, his head uncovered, and his dark eyes reading her face as if he would read down into her heart.

She turned from him impatiently. He had interrupted her thoughts, broken the flow of her soothing stream of repentance, and she was angry with him, as she often was; for all that she upheld him when Mrs. Stewart found fault with him, and rebuked those who rebuked him.

"No," she said haughtily; "when I want you to do anything for me, Vincenzo, I will ask you—you need not offer."

"The Signorina is mistress. She could never ask

me for what I would not give her—even my life," said Vincenzo, with more earnestness than is generally thrown into such-like professions of faith and offers of service. "But the little bird cannot be kept. He must be buried; and soon."

"Leave me. You are impertinent—you are tiresome!" said Ione angrily. "If I choose he shall not be buried at all. I am the mistress. If I choose to keep him, what is that to you?"

"Padrona," said Vincenzo humbly. "But it will do you harm to keep him, Signorina. It will give you fever."

"What right have you to speak? You shall not take my bird from me! Leave me, I say!" said Ione, with vehemence and passion.

"Padrona," repeated Vincenzo; and at the word he was gone, rounding the corner of the house like a dusky shadow gliding from her path.

Then Ione dashed away for her own part into a special place among the trees which she had made her own, and where she always went when oppressed and disturbed. And here, throwing herself on the ground, she covered the dead bird with passionate kisses, saying again and again: "I loved you, Mimi! I loved you! Oh believe that I loved you! I killed you, but I loved you!"

## CHAPTER XIV.

## DOMESTICATED.

"WE shall have to introduce you to some of our friends," said Captain Stewart one day when St. Claire was at the Villa Clarissa, as he so often was now.

"If you intend to pass the winter here you must go into society," said Mrs. Stewart in her gently sorrowful way. "You will find some pleasant people both among ourselves and the Palermitans."

"Yes," said the Captain; "that every one would say. The Palermitans are wonderfully hospitable to strangers who are fitly introduced."

"I thought the Italians did not understand hospitality," said St. Claire.

"In our way perhaps no, in their way yes. They do not ask you to dinner, but they give you a seat in their carriage and take you to eat ices. You cannot go in upon them at twelve o'clock in the day, but you are free of their salons every evening when they are at home; and you may go as early as the habits of the place allow and stay as late—not wearing out your welcome by repetition. We give food, they companionship. Our method is a survival of the time when starvation was a man's ever-present foe, theirs of a state of society when personal peril was the greatest fact of life—when, therefore, the defence of association



was the greatest need, and admission to that association the supreme mark of confidence."

"I see," said St. Claire, who thought the explanation more ingenious than true.

"One thing will be sure to strike you—the dreadful number of titles here," said Mrs. Stewart in an aggrieved voice.

She rejoiced in the fact, but she liked to complain of it. She was too thoroughly English not to reverence rank, but she was also too thoroughly English not to resent the apportionment which gave that rank to the Palermitans and left themselves without "handles," though with undoubted pedigree.

"That makes no difference," said Captain Stewart. "Among themselves they are punctilious enough on the matter of relative rank, but they do not care two straws about it with us. An Englishman is always an Englishman to them, whether he be a lord or only a plain mister; and they like us as a race. Which is so much in our favour as individuals."

"I am sure I wonder that they do!" said Ione abruptly.

No one answered her; and though St. Claire looked at her, as if in response, he did not speak. He thought he should probably get her into trouble if he drew her out.

"I shall be very glad to know any of your friends," he then said, having nothing else to say; but in his own mind he thought he should find none so congenial to him as were these hospitable Stewarts, with their pretty place and their charming daughters.

"I will put you up to a few of the most special," then said the Captain, and forthwith began a list of

Princes and Princesses, Barons and Baronesses, Counts and Countesses, till his guest wondered if the city held an untitled man or woman in its ranks at all. It was a long page of the Palermitan Almanach de Gotha to learn, but St. Claire had a good head and a retentive memory, and social dignities came easily in his way. To be sure he made a few mistakes and misfits, as was but natural. He gave the grandfather as a son, and called the daughter-in-law the mother, and hopelessly jumbled up, as if in a bag, the various members of that large family, each of whom had a different name and title from the others. But he made out something definite at last, and established a kind of central point round which all the rest would cluster in time.

He made out clearly and distinctly the individuality of that travelled and well-read Countess who had been everywhere, and who knew all the picturesque by-places as well as the general centres of interest in Europe. And her daughter—that ideal kind of princess whom all women loved and all men adored, whose mind was as rich as her personality was gracious—he got her, too, well established, so that he should know them both when he should be taken to call. That grand old Princess, the doyenne of the local aristocracy, with her stainless repute and honourable name; her daughter so interesting and gentle and so curiously English in character; and her daughter again, so curiously English in physique—these images too, he fixed as those of people he was bound to respect and admire when he met them. The grandfather of this last, this fair-faced Palermitan lily, one of the many noble exiles of '48, was another personality not likely to slip. When

he, St. Claire, came to know him, the Stewarts said, he would find him the most delightful companion in the world, and the best "raconteur." His stories of English life and experience were inimitable! And those two brothers, who also had been of the emigration—the elder, as Captain Stewart said: "the best-bred man in the island;" to which Mrs. Stewart added as her testimony: "with all the graces of his own race and all the virtues of ours, and with none of the faults of either"—the younger, in his time one of the most gallant soldiers of all in the national army—they were cleared from the mass, and made as sharp and distinct as two cameos. So were the noble-hearted, handsome wife and the graceful daughter with her gift of genius, belonging to the one—the bright and hospitable signora with the studious son, of the other. That charming group of friends and relations, so good and true and simple and sincere; the patriarch of the English colony, with his magnificent garden, his gentle wife and her sweet kindness; the scholarly clergyman, and his wife whose life had been a romance; the men of letters here; the men of science there; the pleasant Baron; the kindly Duke; the learned Abbate; the famous Professor—it was an interesting page of personal gossip, the "carte du pays" well drawn out; and it amused St. Claire, who, as has been said, was fond of genealogy and local Debretts.

"Now be sure you distinguish one from the other, and do not confound A with B nor C with D," said Captain Stewart. "Above all, take pains to learn your pronunciation correctly. A letter makes all the difference; as between that fascinating Princess and my dear good friend Luigi, for example. Doubled when

it should be single, or deprived of its consort when it should be doubled, will land you in more holes than one. So be careful."

"I will do my best," said St. Claire.

"How can it interest you to know anything of the people here, you who come from England?" said Ione scornfully.

"Why not?" Armine answered. "Do you not think it interesting to study differences?"

"Not for an Englishman to study a continental!" said Ione superbly.

"How can you be so prejudiced, Nony!" said Clarissa. "Why are not foreigners as good as we are? Poor dears! I am sure they are."

"I don't think so," said Ione; and on Mrs. Stewart returning plaintively: "My poor dear misguided child, what can you possibly know of the matter?" and Captain Stewart adding bluntly: "Shut up, Io, and let us have no more of your confounded nonsense!" that thread of talk dropped and was not taken up again.

And yet Ione had only said what she had heard a dozen times before from the two who represented her parents. Had Clarissa scoffed at the people among whom they had elected to make their home, they would have smiled at her enthusiastic patriotism, and would have said she was not so far wrong in her estimate—but what Clarissa might do with honour was counted to Ione for shame—even though the father and mother did their best to be just; and were just, according to their ability.

The Stewarts not only made themselves St. Claire's introducers to the society of the place, but they also took pains to show him everything of interest, and

pecially to localise the native legends and historic events. They took him to the exact spot where the Sicilian vespers began, and tried in vain to teach him how to pronounce that famous shibboleth of "ciceri." They traced the line on the hill where Garibaldi and his devoted band came down in their strength like a living stream dyed red with the glorious dawn, bringing the freedom of Sicily as their offering to Palermo. They translated for his benefit old ballads, like that of the "Baronessa di Carini"; and told him those wonderful stories of courage and audacity which have already made of the brigand chief Leone a being almost as legendary as Fra Diavolo. They showed him over the new institutions, and severely criticised all the details of management; as the English always do, whether at home or abroad. They took him to the churches, some of which were under repair, and fell foul of every bit of modern work, however well done, which was to restore the lost substance of the old and fill up the gaps made by time. But then they would not have been English here too, had they not idealised the remote past of Italy and vilified the immediate present. Had they not read their Ruskin; and was it not in their province, as members of the nation which set up the Duke and his horse over a gateway, and substituted the Griffin for Temple Bar, to lecture all others on taste and the conservation of things ancient and historic? and, above all, were not the picturesque ignorance and darkness, disease and misery of old times worth all the unæsthetic light and liberty and health and strength of these modern degenerate days? To hear the English in Italy, one would say that the prosperity, the education and liberty of a whole people

are not worth a fine façade, nor an imposing procession; and that something pretty to look at is worth far more than free government or wholesome living. And the Stewarts, though enlightened people in their own way, were not proof against the prevailing folly of their race.

And finally, to complete their good offices, they introduced him to society, so that he was made free of all the houses which were open to themselves.

Then it was that he found for himself how frank and hospitable are these dear Italian islanders, with the proud and capable Saracenic strain running through their blood; their myths of old Greece floating like perfume and echoing like music through the air; their pathetic history and their stirring feuds; their saintly legends which jostle and displace the divine old myths, or rather into which those myths have transformed themselves; their commemorative customs which lift the whole life out of the commonplace into the ideal;—those dear Italian islanders, to know whom is to love!—as he proved for his own part; and with reason.

The Countess showed him her house and the Count took him over his garden. The Princess had him to her receptions and made him a favourite guest when out for her villeggiatura. The two dear brothers invited him to dinner, and the girl entranced him with her singing. Every one was kind to him, every one made much of him—the women, because he was so interesting and handsome and delicate and young, and the men, because it pleased the women and he looked as if he had no harm in him. So that for a broken-hearted lover, as he was, St. Claire enjoyed himself discreetly and carried his secret sorrows bravely.

Truly, without disloyalty to his lost love, his wounds were doing well. A spiritual surgeon, making his diagnosis with judgment, would have said that they were granulating apace and looking remarkably healthy. It must be so. To live with a dead joy never absent from one's consciousness is very soon to die with it. For the mind follows the law of the body, and wounds which will not heal bring all things to destruction.

So the time passed. The soft-spoken, gentlemanly, handsome young fellow was so accustomed to be petted and caressed—so used to be treated as a personage of importance—that all the kindness lavished on him by his new friends came to him as by prescriptive right, and he took it with that simplicity of acceptance which of itself is a charm in the beautiful young. He made no disclaimers and no opposition; showed no surprise, and only expressed his gratitude by smiling amiably when he was flattered, and looking content when he was singled out for supreme attention and marked kindness. When bright eyes shone the brighter as he entered the room, and sweet voices had an extra touch of silver as they spoke to him, he took it all as one who knew the whole rosary by heart, and who received only his due. And this quiet unconsciousness of any special grace in the favours accorded him made part of his success with the women. The men perhaps said a few hard things among themselves, as was but natural; but the women found it lovely. It was the unconscious self-assertion of a superior person whose credentials are undeniable. It was the prince travelling incognito, who does not think it strange when some more acute

than the rest drops a court courtesy, and says, Your Royal Highness.

He took it all so much as his by right that surely it was so! Well-dressed, well-mannered, with his air of accustomedness to luxury and homage and the finer things of life, he had the look of a man richer than his expenditure, and superior to the conditions which it has pleased him for the moment to adopt. To see him here in Palermo no one would have supposed that for his sole wealth he had only what remained of those three hundred pounds which had been brought him by the ravens, and the reversionary interest, when his health should be re-established, of a small country practice which gave him bread and left no margin for butter. He had the air of thousands a year; and Palermo set him down at the value of his looks.

This was not his fault. The most rigid moralist could scarcely have held him bound to appear poor for truth's sake, or to publish a statement of his finances in "Lo Statuto." It had been his misfortune before now to look one thing and be another; and this was only a repetition of the old litany of misunderstanding which more than once had been intoned to his disaster.

Where all liked him, the Stewarts liked him most of all. Even the wiry and determined Captain, his very antithesis in some things, found points of agreement in others, which made the running smooth. To be sure he would not have chosen this soft-voiced and gentle-mannered young physician as his partner in a difficult business, where he had risked his fortune to save it only by bold combinations and resolute action. He would not have put him at the head of an explor-



ng expedition where courage and endurance were the alphabet of success; nor would he have sent him where astuteness and diplomatic fence were the great things needed. But he liked him as a guest; he trusted him with the girls; and he believed him to be a man to whom any father might safely give his daughter, sure that, when he married, his wife's happiness would be welded into the very substance of her wedding-ring.

As they saw more and more of him, both father and mother felt, what they did not acknowledge even to each other, that, as Clarissa's choice, this charming young fellow should meet with no opposition, and Gull should supply the wedding-cake. They had decided, as we know, that Clarissa should not marry a Sicilian; and the English colony was poor in available husbands. Though the farthest possible removed from wishing her to marry at all, they were too loving and just to desire her to remain single for their sakes. And here was the man who, in body, mind, and estate, seemed made for the occasion.

They knew nothing of his broken fortunes and unhappy love. They saw him only as Edward Formby's friend, therefore to be trusted and believed in as what he seemed to be; and he seemed to be little less than a prince in disguise. In his sweet impartial way he was equally devoted to both girls; but parental love gave the balance that extra weight which made Clarissa turn the scale. How should she not? Who in his senses would prefer Ione, that uncomfortable anomaly with her red-gold hair and indescribable green eyes—that odd mixture of passion and indolence, of dreams and unrest—to a sweet-tempered sensible little pigeon like Clarissa, whose worst moods, compared to the

ordinary outbursts of that other, were like April showers set against tropical tempests? And such a good wife as she would make!—so domestic, so clever in management, so notable and exact—did that count for nothing? Ione, who had been just as well trained, given the same advantages, and brought up on the same lines, could do nothing useful, and was discontented, undisciplined, and jealous. In fact, Ione was not to be thought of when Clarissa was to the fore; and St. Claire was far too nice a fellow to be thrown away.

Yes, the thing fitted. Now that his health had become so much more robust, and there was evidently nothing much amiss—given the question of settlements satisfactorily arranged—there would be no objection raised when the moment came.

Though the Captain did not harbour this thing as a planned future—only perceived it as a possible contingency—Mrs. Stewart, womanlike, cherished it as a charming picture, over which, however, she would break her heart should it cease to be a picture and become a living fact; and St. Claire got the good of the situation. Meanwhile the picture grew daily more vivid to the mother, as the handsome young fellow crept closer and closer into her affections, and she felt as Oakhurst before her had felt, that he was “so good” and “so pure.”

On his side, that healthy granulation of his wounds went steadily on, and the solid silver chain of friendship supplied the broken golden links of love; he all the time taking everything with that simplicity of acceptance which made petting and devotion his right—due by the letters-patent of nature and fitness. Not that he was a coxcomb. He was simply a man

n whom the feminine element predominated over the masculine—whose very virtues were feminine, and whose manhood was free from manly vices—who was sweet and gentle and affectionate and pure, suspecting no evil, and meaning as little as he suspected. His character failed in force but was rich in beauty; and for the strength of will which was wanting he substituted delicacy of conscience, which perhaps came to the same thing in the end.

But with all this pleasant toying with this newly minted silver chain of friendship, his heart turned ever and ever back to the broken golden links, and he knew, with unwavering conviction, that Monica Barrington was the only woman he had ever loved or ever could love, as the true meaning of love goes. All before her had been phantasms—all after her would be ghosts; and neither in phantasms nor in ghosts is there solid substance for the heart or soul of man.

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## CHAPTER XV.

## WHICH? OR EITHER?

NONE of his later friends took the place of the first with St. Claire. He was stanch to his flag, and allowed no one to exercise the same kind of fascination over him as did the Stewarts, with those two pretty girls as the chief workers of the spell. The glamour of the place was round Clarissa equally with Ione, and in his present poetic mood he idealised even that most commonplace little person, and made a bit of ordinary satin-stone do duty for a pearl of price.

It was all the fault of Nature—that grand enchantress who transmutes common earths into noble gems; all the fault of that great sun-god who hides beneath a veil of glory whatever is less than lovely, and touches into divine magnificence things which, left to themselves, are mean and sordid and of no repute.

Moreover, being heart-broken for Monica and pledged to eternal widowerhood and constancy, the young doctor had no scruple in surrendering himself to the fascinations of these two innocent Vivienues, believing Ione morally lovely against his better judgment and Clarissa poetically delightful against his truer perception.

Could it be said that he flirted? If he did, then

it was with both girls at once—with one as much as, and no more than, with the other. Had he been accused, he would have repudiated the accusation in all eagerness and sincerity, and would have said he meant nothing, and they knew that he meant nothing. But then we repudiate many things which the watching world asserts of us. And which, pray you, is true?—our own heart, with its trick of self-deception and power of blunting the fine edge of conscience, or the evidence gathered by those who think they see to the foundations when they do not penetrate below the surface? Between self-deception and purblindness poor Truth has a bad time of it;—as now, in the way in which things were going and judged of at the Villa Clarissa.

For instance, was it flirting when, one afternoon, as the young people were whiling away the time by spelling words with ivory letters, St. Claire, taking up the letters C. A. S., put them before Clarissa, saying: “Your initials are the same as mine, only transposed. Clarissa Alice Stewart—Armine St. Claire;”—looking at her as he spoke with eyes which seemed to be as full of love as his words were full of secret meaning? Perhaps Clarissa thought so; and perhaps Ione thought so; for the one blushed and looked down, and the other grew pale and looked away, as she held up her head with the severe disdain of one who will not waste her time in folly—or worse.

“You cannot make any good of yours, if I can of mine,” laughed Clarissa, glancing at her mother, who was comfortably dozing on the sofa. “They say that the initials of our name should spell something sensible to bring good luck. Now A. S. C. don’t spell any-

thing, do they? But I can make mine into a word—‘cas.’ I wonder what ‘cas’!” she laughed again.

“All that is beautiful—all that is delightful!” said St. Claire with gallant fervour. “If only wishes were as powerful as they are sincere!”

“Well, if they were?” asked Clarissa, with sweet unconsciousness of backgrounds and double meanings.

“You should be one of the golden glories of the world!” said St. Claire, repeating the former phase of gallant fervour.

“Oh, I should make a very bad kind of ‘golden glory’!” said Clarissa, her eyes sparkling, her whole plump, sleek little person sleeker and plumper than ever with this pleasant influx of gratified vanity. “I am only a humble little mouse. If I could be transformed I should like to be made into a bird or a flower, and to leave all the grand things to others.”

“We will find some good fairy to make you into a pretty little singing-bird, and put you in a cage full of flowers,” said St. Claire.

“And then Nony would kill me,” said Clarissa with rather a falsetto accent in her voice.

“No, she would take care of you and feed you with sugar,” said St. Claire. “What shall we make you, Miss Ione?” he asked, turning to the younger girl with just the same sweetness of manner as he had had when speaking to Clarissa. “Will you be a golden glory, or a bird in a cage full of flowers? I fancy the former would suit you better than the latter. What do you say?”

Ione’s rigid face did not relax by a line. She had no relish for the aftermath of attentions—for the mere gleanings of the field; and to talk nonsense—and such

nonsense!—to her as a second to Clarissa was worse than neglect.

“I do not know what you are talking about!” she said with supreme disdain.

“Whether you will be a bird, like that poor little Mimi you killed, or a golden glory set upon a throne,” said Clarissa. “I am going to be another Mimi—but you are not to kill me, you know. Dr. St. Claire has promised that you will not. He says you will give me sugar instead. Will you give me quantities of sugar, Nony?”

“Do not include me in such absurdity,” said Ione proudly. “You know how much I dislike nonsense.”

“I forgot that you are sacred when you play queen—and you are playing queen now,” said Clarissa, with unabated good-humour. “We all have to attend to Nony’s wishes when she plays queen,” she added blithely to St. Claire. “Have we not, Nony?”

“If teasing is attending to one’s wishes—yes,” said Ione.

“Naughty No! now you are cross,” laughed Clarissa, pinching her cheek. “What a naughty little No it is!”

“Don’t, Clarissa,” cried Ione, pushing away her sister’s hand. “You are too aggravating to be borne!”

“My dear Ione, your temper grows worse every day of your life,” said Mrs. Stewart, who had roused herself from her doze at the first sound of Ione’s irritated voice. “You allow yourself to be made angry by the merest trifle—you cannot bear a joke nor enter into any kind of innocent fun. I really do not know what to do with you,” she added, in her helplessly plaintive but not acrimonious way.

"It is not fun, mamma; it is ill-natured teasing," said Ione.

"That is because you are ill-tempered, my poor girl. If you were as amiable as Clarissa, you would take things as she means them," said Mrs. Stewart.

"I am sure I did not wish to tease you, Nony," said Clarissa with genuine amiability—perhaps a little heightened for the good effect to be produced. "Do not scold her, mother. It was my fault. I ought to have been more careful," she added nicely; and St. Claire thought to himself: "What a heavenly temper that dear little girl has; and what a pity this beautiful creature should be so nervous," smiling on both with impartial benignity.

"I am sorry if I was cross; but you know you meant to tease me, Clarissa," said Ione with an effort.

And with this she got up and left the room, and no one saw her again for that night. She had a headache and had gone to bed, she said, when Clarissa knocked at her barred door to tell her to come into the drawing-room to wish Dr. St. Claire good-night, as he was going away. But Vincenzo, who found himself in the garden beneath her window long after midnight, saw her sitting out on the loggia in the moonlight, with a look on her face which went to his heart like a wound; and which he thought to himself: How could he avenge?

This was one example of St. Claire's mindless method of making love—but to which? Or it might be simply an instance of his ordinary manner, according to the way in which it was taken. In any case it must be confessed that it was a manner to the highest extent silly, yet both misleading and provocative.



Another time he was singing one of his pretty little French songs—that whereof the burden was: “M’amie que j’aime tant!” While he sang he looked at Ione, only because she chanced to be in the line of vision, and he must look at something. But, because as he had last sung that song to Monica, his voice was full now of tremulous passion and his eyes were dark and tender with unshed tears. And when a handsome young fellow looks full into the face of a beautiful girl, with such eloquence of feeling as St. Claire betrayed at this moment, and says in tones which vibrate with the very pathos of devotion: “M’amie que j’aime tant!” what can people think but that this too is a method of making love?

Yet in truth nothing was farther from Armine’s thoughts than wilful love-making. It was only his treacherous eyes, and his state of gentle melancholy and chronic heartbreak which made him look like it. But Ione’s cheeks turned pale, and her eyes were dark as night as she cast them down beneath her heavy lids; and her heart, whispering to her hope: Was it meant? was answered back by both pride and fear.

St. Claire had a fine cat’s-eye ring. It was almost unique for colour and lustre, and he was proud of it. It was one of the few things which he had preserved from the wreck of his fortune, and he always felt that in some sense his good luck was bound up with this gem. One day Mrs. Stewart—who, by the way, was invariably present while St. Claire made his odd double-handed love—asked to see this ring. He took it from his finger and gave it to her. From her it passed to Clarissa, who, girl-like, put it on her own finger. But it was too large for any of the pretty little

pink fingers which made the delight of the Palermitan glove-makers, and her own despair at their constant misfits. It was next handed to Ione, who looked at it without trying it on.

"See if it fits you," said St. Claire, as if it had been the glass slipper and he the prince on the search for Cinderella.

Her hand, though finely shaped, was many sizes larger than Clarissa's; and St. Claire's was small for a man. The ring which he wore on his little finger fitted her third to perfection—her third—the fatal finger of a woman's hand!

"It goes perfectly," said St. Claire, with a smile. "I did not think our hands paired so well."

"If they do, yours must be too small for a man, or Ione's too large for a woman," said Mrs. Stewart, with her usual manner of gentle displeasure.

To which Ione, holding up her beautiful hands in the pose in which they made the best lines and had the most becoming physiognomy, said, with hypocritical humility: "*Mine are* too large for a woman, mamma. Did you ever see such awful monsters?"

"No, they are beautiful!" said St. Claire, with anatomical admiration. "And so," turning to Clarissa, "are yours, Miss Stewart—of a different style from your sister's, but equally beautiful."

"You have catholic tastes, Dr. St. Claire," said Mrs. Stewart, a shade of petulance mingled with her general melancholy.

"I cultivate catholicity of taste. I have a great dislike to one-sidedness and narrowness," answered Dr. St. Claire, in his sweet way.

"One may be too catholic," returned Clarissa's

mother. "I will say to you what our good clergyman once said to a dreadful sceptic who was here: 'Better be anchored to something, no matter what, than floating about at the mercy of every wind that blows.'"

"Yes, in matters of opinion; but in the faculty of finding the beautiful—is it not better to be able to find that everywhere than only in a few isolated spots?" asked St. Claire.

"If you confine yourself to what you call finding the beautiful, to pictures or places or churches, perhaps you are right," answered Mrs. Stewart. "But this kind of temperament goes into so much else, and sometimes leads to great danger—to latitudinarianism, for example, and indecision of character all through."

"It may, but not necessarily," said St. Claire.

"It is so much better to know your own mind and hold by your opinions," said Mrs. Stewart.

And St. Claire could not for the life of him imagine what she meant, or of what she was vaguely accusing him. He had never seen her so nearly ill-tempered as she was to-day; and he looked at her with professional criticism to catch the hues and lines which should give him the key and tell him what ailed her body and consequently warped her mind. But he could make out nothing different from other days; so he took refuge in that wide haven of unknown influences, the atmosphere; and said to himself: "She is under the weather. Perhaps it is scirocco."

Soon after this they went into the garden, as they always did when St. Claire was at the villa; for he was not weary yet of this strange and delightful sensation of being in the heart of summer in February and

March; and the Stewarts too were fond of flowers and fresh air.

As they strolled along the pathway, bordered with roses of all kinds and shades, St. Claire picked a beautiful "blush" bud; round, smooth, compact, delicately tinted; which he gave to Clarissa, saying, with a charming smile: "Like to like, as the old valentines say; or Sweets to the sweet—that is better."

Whereat Mrs. Stewart, in her turn gently smiling, though with the intention of mild reproof, said: "You must not spoil my child by flattering her too much, Dr. St. Claire."

"I do not think she could be spoilt," returned St. Claire, in his sweet way. "She is too good!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Stewart; "that is just it—she is too good to be spoilt. But we do not mean the same thing. We use the phrase differently. I mean that she is so nice now, it would be a pity to spoil her by flattery; and your meaning is not the same."

"Is telling people you admire them—is giving them credit for their good qualities, flattery?" asked St. Claire, amiably argumentative. "I do not think so. There are so many willing to tell us all sorts of disagreeables and horrors, I think it only fair to declare what we admire, and praise candidly what is deserving of praise."

"It is an amiable feeling, but a rather dangerous practice," said Mrs. Stewart, a little drily; but when St. Claire replied: "You are always so just and generous in your sentiments, Mrs. Stewart, I am conscious I ought to attend to your advice," she did not see that this was flattery, nor that the handsome young fellow reinstated himself in her good graces by the very re-

petition of the fault which had in some sense disturbed his holding.

It would not have disturbed her at all had St. Claire been content to flatter Clarissa alone. It was the association of Ione—the reduplication—which fretted her. For instance, after this little passage of arms, where the foils were sheathed in velvet scabbards, the young physician tripped again in his fence; and this time more grievously.

Ione had heard nothing of that compliment and the small discussion founded on it. She had wandered away alone, as she often did, no one knew why, and was now sauntering between the thick lines—indeed almost hedgerows—of spiked lavender, which hid all but her golden head and proud columnar throat. They all met where the rose-path intersected the lavender. At this point was the most beautiful rose-tree in the garden—that superb and royal gloire de Dijon which people bribed the gardener to despoil for them, and paid heavily for buds and cuttings; which last, it must be said, by some mysterious fatality, never came to any good. Antonio accepted the money and gave the equivalent; but he took care that this equivalent should never fructify, and that his padrone alone should possess the prize.

St. Claire picked one of the half-opened flowers and offered it to Ione.

“The queen of the flowers to the queen of the garden,” he said, thinking of Clarissa’s accusation of queenliness, and meaning nothing more than he had meant to Clarissa—nothing more than if he had offered a sugar-plum to a child and kissed her afterwards.

“Now, Dr. St. Claire, what have I just been say-

ing?" said Mrs. Stewart sharply. "I will not have these girls spoilt and made fools of!"

In a moment Ione comprehended the situation. Her eye caught the blush rosebud in Clarissa's breast; her ear the acrid accent in her adopted mother's voice; and her jealous fancy supplied the rest.

"Here, Clarissa," she said, giving her the rose. "Roses and pretty speeches belong to you, not to me."

"Thank you, Nony, but keep your own," said Clarissa quite amiably. "Pink and yellow do not go together, and I am satisfied with what I have."

"Will you not have it?" asked Ione, offering it for the second time.

"No!" said Clarissa.

"Nonsense, Ione, take your rose and wear it, and do not make such a fuss about a mere trifle like this!" said Mrs. Stewart with more and more acridity of voice and manner.

"I do not want it," said Ione, tearing the petals from the calyx and tossing them in a pale golden shower among the scented leaves of the lavender.

A few minutes after, St. Claire had drawn her away from the others and was standing with her among the roses alone.

"How did I offend you by giving you that rose?" he asked anxiously, his beautiful eyes full of misleading tenderness and undesigned pathos.

"You did not offend me," said Ione proudly.

"Then why did you not wear it, as your sister wore hers?" he asked. "Why did you destroy it, and fling it so contemptuously away, if you were not annoyed with me for giving it to you?"

"And why should you give me one when you had

already given one to Clarissa?" returned Ione. "Do you think it a compliment to any girl to come second?"

"But some one must be first in order of time," pleaded St. Claire. "Order of time does not make order of merit or degree of interest," he added soothingly, looking at Ione as if he loved her.

"I do not understand sharing, and I will never take the second place," said Ione, sticking to her own point, and wide of St. Claire's.

And with this she walked proudly away, her head erect, her shoulders straight, her face set like a flint, and her heart full of hatred to all the world, but specially full of contempt for Clarissa and anger against St. Claire.

He, poor fellow, was lost in a kind of mental fog, wherein he was only conscious of amazement and distress—amazement that he had so evidently hurt Ione by such a common-place little action, and distress that he had blundered so innocently into evil. The true solution never entered his mind; and he gave the credit of all this abnormal susceptibility to that much-enduring beast of burden the weather—that scapegoat which has to carry so many sins of temper on its back, as now it bore Ione's exaggerated exclusiveness, just as it had carried Mrs. Stewart's unwonted acerbity.

"Assuredly I must pick no more roses at the Villa Clarissa!" he said to himself as he walked home to his hotel. "They are as dangerous as those which cost the merchant his daughter and gave poor Beauty to the Beast! It is enchanted ground all through, and things are not what they seem from first to last. What is true, however, is the sweet amiability of that pretty

little Clarissa, and the exceedingly regrettable temper of that beautiful Ione. What a pity she should spoil herself as she does by her temper! And what a pity, too, that they should not treat her with a little more consideration of her infirmity! It is only humane and philosophical to be considerate of an infirmity like that," he went on to say to himself, with the serene philosophy of people who judge from a distance and whose nerves are not worn by the peculiarities which rasp those of close companions bare. "We all have our faults; but what kind of life should we make if we were not forbearing one to the other? Of course we ought to be forbearing. And that is just where these dear delightful people fail with Ione—they are not forbearing enough to her, and do not know how to treat her. Ah! if Monica, that beautiful, that half-divine Monica, could but know her! What good she would do her! How she would bring out all that is lovely in her nature and check by her sweet example all that is unworthy! Beautiful and half-divine in very truth—ah! I shall never see her like! No one is her equal! She stands alone like the crowned queen of gracious womanhood; and I love her, and have lost her!"

Back over his heart came the old rush of grieving love. His wounds reopened and bled with all their former violence. He forgot Palermo, the Stewarts, Ione, his present place, the present moment, and where his footsteps fell and whither they were leading him. He walked on mechanically, like a somnambulist in his dreams, unconscious of whom he met, unconscious, too, that tears were in his eyes. He was once more with Monica in the garden, going through the agony



of his denied love; and all the rest was blank. He saw nothing and knew nothing; not even that he passed so close by Captain Stewart as to touch his shoulder with his own.

"Has St. Claire been here to-day?" asked the Captain when he reached home after this odd encounter.

"Yes," returned Mrs. Stewart.

"Did anything happen?" the master inquired again.

"No, nothing," was the reply; but Clarissa blushed a little at her mother's disclaimer, and Ione's strange eyes flashed, and her cheeks turned ashen pale.

"Well, he looked like a man possessed, or who has had some heavy sorrow," said the Captain, with a sharp glance beneath his eye-brows at each of the girls in turn. "He was walking down the Maqueda, evidently seeing nothing and no one; for he touched me as he passed and never saw me at all; and I swear his eyes were full of tears!"

"Impossible!" said Mrs. Stewart.

"I saw them," repeated her husband. "His face was as white as a sheet, his eyes were straight before him, and, as I live, they were full of tears!"

"How extraordinary!—how very distressing!" said Mrs. Stewart, with a curious little sentiment of pleasure in her sympathy.

"Did he seem out of sorts?" asked her husband.

"No; he was in very good spirits all the time he was here," she replied. And on the Captain saying "Humph!" the conversation dropped.

But each woman gave a different version to her own heart.

"Poor sensitive young fellow, he was pained because I scolded him," thought Mrs. Stewart, with the complacency of gratified power.

"He thought that mother did not like him to be kind to me," said Clarissa to herself, with that soft little smile of pleased vanity of which the satin lining is nascent love.

And: "I made him feel—I made him unhappy. He did not mean to slight me, and he does respect my rights," were Ione's thoughts as she sat by her window and looked out on the stars, and felt her heart throb with the passionate beat of triumphant pride and assuaged jealousy;—no longer the second, but emphatically the first!

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## CHAPTER XVI.

## A DAY WITH THE GODS.

AMONG the pleasant home-customs kept up by the English colony in Palermo, that of making picnic parties to beautiful spots in the neighbourhood is the most delightful. The climate lends itself to this form of enjoyment perhaps better than to any other, and the traditions of the old country are in perfect harmony with the conditions of the new.

The Stewarts were great people for these picnic parties; and their charming outings to Mondello Bay, to Solanto, to Sferricavallo, and the like, were among the festas which counted as social blue ribands to the invited. Having now a young prince in disguise like Armine St. Claire, to show attention to whom was both pleasure and duty in one, they turned over the idea of a luncheon *al fresco* at Mondello Bay till they got it into working order; finally arranging to give on a certain Thursday one of those charming picnics, after the manner of the Anglo-Palermians, in honour of the handsome and heart-broken adorer of dreamy-eyed Monica Barrington—provided only that the scirocco did not blow in those maddening clouds of dust which render life intolerable and locomotion impossible, reducing all sensation to suffering and all virtue to patience!

No such mischance, however, happened on this special Thursday. The air being as clear as crystal,

and no wind to speak of blowing from any quarter at all, the party that had been proposed came off in due course; and all who had been invited were present on the ground and punctual to the time.

No festa ever promised fairer than this which had been got up in St. Claire's special honour. Though winter according to the calendar, it was summer according to Réaumur; and the day was one made for happiness alone. It was a day which justified the reputation of the Sicilian climate, and gave those who rejoiced in its splendour cause to pity the poor frozen and befogged dwellers in the brave old home. Bright, light, warm, and full of colour, the atmosphere was as if just renewed in the great laboratory of nature. What germs it held were surely only the forms of beautiful growths and harmonious conditions! Disease, decay, rust and stain, could not exist in that exquisite envelope, that luminous ocean of untainted air; but all forms of beauty floated like filmy clouds across the deep blue sky and looked out from the depths of the translucent sea. The old gods were once more the mild rulers of heaven, the benevolent guests of men, the glad lovers of nymph and mortal maid; and the past, the present, and the future made one great whole of glorious memory, of perfect possession, of divine foreshadowing.

It needed no great stretch of imagination to believe that once, when the world was young and the far-seeing gods were democratic in their lives and wholly human in their loves, on such a day as this Arethusa was pursued and Semele was beloved; that Europa and her companions garlanded the divine bull with asphodels and amaranths, and

Proserpine laughed as she stood knee-deep in flowers on the fatal plains of Enna; that naiads sported with their amorous tritons in the coral caves of the purple sea; that nymphs, wreathed with myrtle, played with young fauns in the shadow of the ilex-woods; that Bacchantes, crowned with vine-leaves, danced in the abandonment of youth and the passionate joy of life while Dionysos and Ampelus looked on, leaning against each other on the ivory couch spread with leopard skins and strewn with roses; that Anadyomene rose in her golden shell from the iridescent foam, and heaven and earth met in loving contact at her feet. It was a day created for love and consecrated to beauty—a day which makes the young unquiet and leaves the old retrospective; the one full of vague melancholy and unformed desires, the other of dear memories overshadowed by regrets that youth should have been so short and time so swift, and the master-flame of life so soon burnt out!

Lucus a non lucendo, because there was not a line of natural relation between Mondello Bay and Oakhurst, not a trace of atmospheric association between this burning sky of Sicily and the pale sunshine of England, St. Claire's heart was full of Monica and the Dower House. Wherever he turned he saw the dreamy grey eyes of the girl he loved—whatever he heard had in it the echo of her soft voice. The love which he carried in his heart transformed all to its own likeness, and, stimulated by the pungent vitality of the day, his partially healed wounds reopened, in spite of their healthy granulation, and bled afresh—as they had bled on the day when Ione had disclaimed his flower and Captain Stewart had met him with tears in his

eyes, walking like a somnambulist down the Via Maqueda.

And so, because he was secretly grieving for the loss of one girl, his manners to these other two were even sweeter, more flattering, more sympathetic than usual; his eyes were softer and fuller of unspoken love; his voice was lower and more seductive in its musical intonation; and his whole being was more and more interpenetrated by that dumb misleading eloquence which proclaimed him the lover he was—but the lover, neither of Clarissa nor of Ione, but of Monica Barrington, unknown and far away.

Yet who thinks of the possibility of the unknown and far away, when this misleading eloquence of unspoken love reveals itself in every word and gesture, every look and accent, of a handsome young man, apparently devoted to one of two pretty girls!—which of the two, however, by no means certain, and the choice one which your own imagination may make at its will. Who suspects a palimpsest, written thick and close with unpublished songs of passion and sorrow, in the tablet which looks untouched, save for the first faint tracing of that little word of LOVE which time is sure to deepen? Palimpsests as we all know ourselves to be so soon as the early days of youth are passed, we accept the seemingly smooth tablet of others with child-like faith; and when we read that little word drawn lightly across the wax we believe it to be of yesterday's inscription and due to our own spiritual penmanship. Fools that we are! It is some old and ineffaceable engraving, the lines of which strike up through the modern overlay, because so deeply marked that nothing can ever obliterate them. They look like

new; but in truth they are the old—the old which renew themselves under all the changed conditions of the surface of things—the old which are eternal, while that surface of things is the sole shifting circumstance. How much of the love we give is the perennial flower of habit! How much of that which we receive is the recurrent fruit of memory! Hearts are like the stems of certain trees, ringed round and round with successive layers. But in the centre is the pith, which is always the same, which is only overlaid by new envelopes, and which is the cause and formative energy of all. “On revient toujours à ses premières amours.” But, does one ever really abandon them? The first child born by the soul to Love modifies all that come after, and every new departure is only in a certain sense a retracing of the old way. The jealous have some reason, then, for demanding absolute virginity of heart in those they love; unless to be jostled and confounded in the memory and association is of no importance to them, and they can make themselves content with the actual fact and the present moment. And the actual fact and the present moment are but very fractional parts of life!

Other young men besides St. Claire were at the picnic. Among them was one specially smart and well-set-up young fellow, the Marchese Mazzarelli, one of the prime social favourites of Palermo. Brilliant, clever, lively, and adept, with laughing eyes and a pleasant tenor voice, an excellent drawing-room conjuror and a graceful dancer, with an inexhaustible fund of good temper, good spirits, and social resource, it was no wonder that all the world agreed to treat him like the favourite child of the community—the

spoiled darling of fortune—and to make him feel that he was most welcome where all were well received. He passed for being an admirer of Ione Stewart; but, as he was poor, and she had no marriage portion, his admiration would never be suffered to culminate into the fiasco of an offer and the heartbreak of impossibility. With all his brightness and good spirits, and what looked on the surface like heedlessness and want of reflection, he had far too much solid Italian common-sense for that! Had he been in Armine's place at Oakhurst, he would have recognized the unconquerable obstacles in his way at once; and he would have saved himself by flight or self-control from all that had overthrown the poor young physician. This self-control in the face of impossibility, by the way, is just the quality for which the world does not give the Italians credit. It happens to be the strongest they possess.

For the rest, Ione, who liked the Marchese as much as she liked any one in Palermo, loved him no more than she loved the rest. She had never deceived herself as to the name or extent of her feelings for him. For her there was but one kind of love—that which makes women martyrs, saints, or criminals—and this was not the liking that she had for Mazzarelli.

Nothing could have been more delightful than was the drive to Mondello Bay, through the Favorita and along the fields which a week ago were red with crimson pheasant's eye, but now were blue with borage and veronica, pale yellow with wild sorrel, and golden with shining chrysanthemums. Tall spikes of Star of Bethlehem stood up like black-eyed meadow-queens in silver robes; the scarlet spears of the gladiolus burnt



like flames among the brushwood; long lines of monthly roses, of pink and scarlet geraniums, of myrtle, of the feathery flowering tamarisk, grew wild in untended hedgerows; orange-gardens poured their powerful perfume in aerial torrents across the road; the coral-tree tossed its crimson blossoms like blood-red foam flecking the bright blue sky; the Judas-tree showed its stately purple against the silvery green of the gnarled and twisted olives; the delicately scented blossoms of the acacia made their odour felt like a low whisper after the louder note of the orange-gardens; and the birds sang from among the drooping branches of the pepper-tree and the thick covert of the ilex-groves, as they had sung from beech and oak when Theocritus wrote his idylls, and Comatas worsted Lacon in his trial of skill in song.

Every one was pleased and every one was pleasant. The girls sang snatches of part-songs, where the men put in now a bass and now a tenor—songs which were often interrupted by outbursts of laughter, as the clatter of passing carts with their tinkling bells and clinking vanes and ornaments of brass, drowned the silver of their voices and broke up what was at the best but very open order and a very ragged kind of going. Still, when one is young and happy and merry and silly, everything adds to enjoyment; and a fiasco does as well as a success.

It was so good to be alive on this bright sweet day of the gods!—so good to be young and healthy, and to know that one's eyes were bright and one's cheeks both fresh and soft!—to know that the future was one's own—a treasure as yet unsecured, a domain as yet unconquered—but all the same one's own!

Even Ione, who was not much given to making herself happy with a multitude, and who generally despised what others admired, even she suffered herself to be thawed into a very creditable condition of good-humour, and took her part with the rest as if she had no special sorrows stinging at her heart like snakes. And Armine, who sat opposite to her and Clarissa, was so far untrue to his cherished memories as to add his sweet sympathetic voice when those part-songs were on hand; even condescending to trivialities like the chorus in the *Funicolare* and the like. But both he and Ione had somewhat the appearance of being happy under protest—like poetry demeaning itself to prose and tragedy forgetting its dignity in farce—which to some gave their good-fellowship a special charm and to others made it a little offensive and pedantic.

On the whole, however, the ayes had it; and every one agreed that this special day and special drive, not to speak of the company and association, were the most perfect, the most enjoyable, the most memorable that had ever been or ever could be. And so, in this mood of universal radiance and content, they drew up on the sands fronting Mondello Bay, and turned down the first leaf in this poetic little chapter of the great book of life and fate.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

## REVELATIONS.

IF nothing could have been more delightful than the drive through the Favorita and rounding the spur of Pellegrino, nothing was more charming than that preliminary stroll on the sands while the servants were preparing the table under the tent already pitched. Ragged men and women, with half-naked children, stood as a fringe round the sandy dunes where grew cistus and myrtles, tamarisk and thorn-apple, with dwarf-iris at their feet. These poor creatures had gathered silently from all four quarters, as if they had come up from the ground; attracted by that strange instinct which brings wild things where prey is to be had, as well as instructed by that secret language which, in a few signs, had passed the news from one to the other that food was about and fragments were sure to fall.

As yet there was no separation into small groups or more intimate couples. The whole body kept together, like a battalion in close order; and so far as things had yet gone the order of the day was essentially republican and the administration communistic. Everybody belonged to everybody else. There was no favouritism, no exclusiveness, no segregation. Armine looked at Ione, talked to Clarissa, laughed

with the Lancini girls, and paid his devoirs like a man to Mrs. Stewart and the elder ladies. So did the other young men; and the girls were no more exclusive than their cavaliers. But when luncheon was over things were naturally changed. They could not all stand shoulder to shoulder like a well-drilled battalion for the whole afternoon; and when the wanderings and explorings, the searchings for shells, for flowers, for shade, for points of view, had set in, then the solid mass decomposed into groups here and couples there. And somehow, no one knew how, not even the girl herself, the Marchese Mazzarelli took possession of Ione—and kept what he took.

In general the young fellow's attentions did not displease Ione. She was a girl like others, and girl-like she enjoyed her triumphs. They put her into good-humour with herself; made her forget the insecurity of her fortunes and the unsatisfactory condition of all things with her; and tore down some of Clarissa's extra decorations. And this, to a girl of her jealous temperament, was always somewhat soothing. But to-day she wished that the Marchese would leave her to herself and carry his laughing eyes and pleasant words to Clarissa—who had coveted them not a little when she could not have them and had had none other to make up for the want of them. To-day she desired them no more than did Ione, and would have found them as unwelcome if she had not received them quite so ungraciously. For St. Claire had joined himself to the plump little human pigeon, and seemed as if he were pinned to her skirts, so close was he in his attendance. And when St. Claire was in the field all other men with these two girls

were thrust into the hedge. He was their "colour" for the moment, and they wore none other.

Devoured by jealousy, Ione only wanted to be alone. Life on this splendid day, when the gods had come back to earth, seemed somehow a terrible mistake. It was above all a mistake to her, cast up by the tide of chance from the depths, she knew neither whence nor how—a mere piece of human wreckage gathered up by hands which regretted their kindly work, and made her feel that they did. Without inherited rights, only with natural claims which she could not enforce, what a miserable life hers was! Had she been the daughter of well-placed parents whose acquaintance was of itself an honour, this new friend of theirs, this Dr. St. Claire, would not have deserted her for Clarissa! He would have been proud to have devoted himself to her; as indeed he ought to be now, for she was a truer friend to him than Clarissa was—much, much truer! If only she could find her own parents and have some one who could maintain her position—or, failing this, if she could but make a home for herself and be free and independent! If only she could leave this beautiful island which, for all its beauty, was to her a prison—these memories of old times where the gods, who once were the friends of man, were to her like grinning spectres—if she could but get away from all she knew and begin a new life in free and independent England! If only she could!

How close St. Claire was standing by Clarissa! What was he showing her? What was he saying to her? How she wished that she could hear! How weak he was to waste his time on such a commonplace

person as Clarissa! He would do far better to devote himself to one of those Lancini girls. At all events they had good eyes, and could use their fans with grace; but Clarissa's eyes were just like two china beads, and she used her fan as if it were a broom-handle. Really she would give up all interest in Dr. St. Claire. He was not worth it. No man who could devote himself like this to Clarissa was worth two thoughts from any other girl. What was he showing her? Their heads were nearly touching. And see! Clarissa was actually drawing her little finger across the palm of his hand, held curved like a cup, as if she were moving something lying in the hollow! She would look no more. The one was unworthy her interest, the other too hopelessly bad all through, to make their doings of any worth whatsoever. They might do as they would. It did not regard her!

Her heart on fire, her brain dizzy with her passionate and jealous wrath, Ione turned towards the sea as if to watch the waves as they ran lipping into shore; while Mazzarelli, always laughing and good-humoured, scraped the sand at her feet for shells, that he might make her find the largest, and glanced at intervals at Clarissa and St. Claire, as they stood there beneath the sun, looking like lovers and talking in commonplaces.

"Who is that young man?" at last asked Armine, his face turned to Mazzarelli.

"Which? Captain Bonacore?" asked Clarissa, looking after a cavalry officer almost out of sight among the rocks.

"He, talking to your sister," said Armine.

He was not jealous like a man, only curious like a woman. Still, he wished that if Ione gathered shells

in concert with a well-set-up, good-looking young fellow with laughing eyes, it had been with an Englishman and not an Italian.

"Oh! Mazzarelli—the Marchese Mazzarelli," said Clarissa. "He is a great friend of ours, and desperately in love with Nony."

She made this statement with quite radiant satisfaction. A month ago she would have warmly denied it had it been made to her.

"I thought so," said St. Claire, an odd little wave of displeasure, which might be called peevishness, overpowering the softer and more refined melancholy of his ordinary mood. "Are they engaged?"

"No, not yet. There is not quite enough money yet, else they would be. But as Nony has no dot, they have to wait till his fortunes are better. It will all come right when an old uncle or aunt, or something like that, of his dies," she added with her well-known amiability; looking sympathetically pleased that Nony had this not too distant nor too desperate chance of happiness.

"Then she is in love with him?" asked Monica's adorer, with another little wave of sad displeasure.

"Of course!" said Clarissa, opening her eyes. "She would not encourage him as she does if she were not."

"Yet, for all her bold lapse from truth at this moment, Clarissa was by no means a chronic fibber. But she was not sorry to deal Ione this sharp backhander, as in some sense a fitting punishment for having attracted Mazzarelli. In her own manageable way she had liked the young Marchese herself, and had secretly resented the unmistakable assignment of his attentions to

Ione. Now she no longer cared for him. Yet she would not let slip this opportunity for punishing the past. "Those who have been to the festa must pay the cost," she said to herself; "and Mazzarelli had been Ione's festa quite often enough to make it right that she should pay when the time came."

"They will make a handsome couple," said St. Claire, looking at them with that kind of gentle envy which belongs to the sympathetic, disappointed in their own happiness, when they contemplate the blessedness of others.

"Yes, he is very good-looking indeed," said Clarissa, emphasizing the last word.

"And your sister is lovely," returned St. Claire.

"Do you really think so?" asked Clarissa in a tone of surprise. "I should say that Nony was more strange-looking than pretty—certainly not lovely, or anything like it! With red hair and yellow eyes, how can she be?"

"I call her hair golden; and her eyes—well, I do not know what they are! They are all colours," said St. Claire.

"All colours! That does not sound very charming," said Clarissa with a little grimace.

"Yours, at all events, do not leave themselves in doubt," said St. Claire gallantly. "Yours are as blue as the heavens—as blue as forget-me-nots."

"But blue eyes are so ugly!" said Clarissa with girlish coquetry.

"I think them beautiful," he answered.

"As beautiful as yellow ones?" she asked with a little laugh.

"Surely!" he answered, more flattering than truthful.



"Well; perhaps it is better than being all colours, like a chameleon," she returned. "I am no chameleon in anything," she then added after a short pause, "neither in my eyes nor my character. Nony is."

"Though there is a certain curious kind of resemblance between you—I can scarcely say where it is; I think it must be that you both have at times a likeness to your father, and that you meet there—yet you are strangely unlike," said St. Claire rather suddenly, still looking at Ione, and from her to Clarissa.

"Of course we are," she answered gaily. "How should we be alike? And how should Nony be like father? How funny!" she added with a little burst of merriment that somehow jarred on St. Claire.

"Why not?" he asked with astonishment. "You are sisters."

Clarissa laughed again. She had been continually laughing during this conversation, and St. Claire, who was usually quite willing to idealize everything connected with any of his new friends, for the first time found himself irritated and oppressed.

"Has no one told you?" she asked, arching her eyebrows still more than nature had already arched them. "Nony has not the remotest relationship to any of us," she said emphatically. "She is an orphan, the daughter of an old friend of father's—but she does not belong to us in any way. He took her when she was quite a little thing; gave her his name and brought her up as one of the family; because he and mother are so good—you do not know how good they are!" she interpolated heartily;—"but she is not one of us—not the least in the world!" she repeated as emphatically as before.

She scarcely knew why she felt it to be such a satisfaction to say this to St. Claire. She had no conscious enmity to Ione; did not want to injure her with the handsome young doctor, or at least she did not think that she did; and yet she felt as if Providence had wrought in her behalf by giving her this opportunity of enlightenment, and that she ought to use it with thankfulness and despatch. She had been longing to tell St. Claire the truth about her sister by adoption. It was not to harm the girl, but to disabuse the man of an error; also in some sense to detach herself. She thought that he ought to know how things were at the Villa Clarissa. Every one in Palermo knew. Why not he with the rest?

Beside this question of truth which seemed to her of such paramount importance—how about that patent fib concerning Mazzarelli?—Clarissa was morally ashamed of Ione. That indolent and discontented nature; those profitless dreams and long hours of idleness; those fierce outbursts of jealousy—witness that cruel murder of the little bird—revolted the better-ordered, more equable and sweet-tempered nature of Clarissa. And just as she felt that she must wash her pink soft hands when she had soiled them, so now she felt that she owed it to herself to repudiate Ione as a blood-relation whose character and conduct reflected on herself, or were derived from her parents.

She looked at her companion to see how her information affected him. An expression came into his face which she could not read. It might be pity or surprise, or something dearer, or something more repellent. She could not fathom it. And as he said nothing more lucid than a trivial "Indeed!" she was

no more helped by his voice than she had been by his eyes. She saw, however, that he looked at Ione with more interest of a kind—of what kind she could not say—than he had looked at her before.

Perhaps it was as well that she could not read the sudden keen desire which almost over-powered him—the passionate wish that possessed him—of doing something for the poor girl's happiness! From the first he had wondered why she seemed to be always in disgrace. Now he understood her isolation; and his heart yearned to help her.

So far Clarissa had not taken much by her cast. In thus separating Ione from the family she had concentrated St. Claire's sympathy, given a voice and a meaning to his pity, and divided his interest.

How he pitied this poor lovely and unloved child! And how beautiful she was! Standing in that wonderful pose of hers, at once so graceful and so proud—her slender figure outlined against the purple sea and deep blue sky—the light wind catching her creamy skirts and blowing them back in cloud-like curves about her feet—the sun glistening on her shining red-gold hair as if it were a broken and interrupted aureole about her head—she might well have been some nymph or goddess of those old times of love and beauty, borne like a radiant dream on the sunshine of to-day—some nymph or goddess bearing the burden of humanity for the dream of love! How beautiful she was!—and, yes, he understood it all now, how isolated and unhappy! She made the third in the trinity of sorrow. Monica, himself, Ione; the first two wrecked because of the love which had been born and strangled at its birth; the third desolate because of the love

which had never been born at all. Semblance for reality, charity for inheritance, sufferance for rights—poor Ione! poor beautiful Ione!

The Marchese, his bright eyes sparkling, was showing her the treasures he had found in the sand; and she, wearied and preoccupied, devoured by jealousy and conscious only of hatred to all mankind, was not doing even her bad best to appear interested. For she had the defects of her qualities, and to the sincerity which would not feign joined that selfishness of pride which would not conceal.

Standing there, proud and weary, she looked across the intervening space to Armine. Their eyes met. They were at some little distance from each other, but they could see clearly though they could not hear. And looking thus, it seemed to him as if she had called him to her—to her as if he had said: “I love you.”

The pity which shone like tears in his soft eyes burnt into her heart like love; and she answered what she thought she saw by a look that half commanded and half besought. He felt impelled to go to her. At any cost of appearance, and at the certain risk of offending Clarissa, he felt that he must make her understand how much he pitied her. He was so sorry for her! and she was so beautiful! He did not believe what Clarissa had told him about the Marchese. Ione was not in love with him. He knew no more than this. Engaged or not, Ione Stewart was not in love with the Marchese Mazzarelli.

In two minutes he was by her side; and Clarissa was left looking for shells alone.

Ione smiled when St. Claire came up as she had

not smiled the whole of this after-part of the day. She felt as if a soft mist had come down between her and the brazen sun, beneath which she had been burned and scorched, leaving her free to enjoy and be glad. The man whose devotion she coveted had obeyed her secret wish. He had left Clarissa for her, and so far her jealousy was appeased. But Clarissa, with crimson for blush-rose on her round fair face, tears in her blue eyes, and as much anger in her heart as her tranquil nature would allow, turned back over the sands to where her father and mother were sitting on the ridge, and, showing her shells as the ostensible reason of her return, said to her mother with an acridity unusual to her:—

“Mother, I wish you would speak to Nony and tell her not to flirt so much as she does. Now with one and now with another—it really does not look nice! It does not seem to matter to her who it is so long as she has some one to pay her compliments and be silly with. And the Italians think it so odd, and say such disagreeable things of us English girls when they see us go on like this. I wish you would speak to her!”

“What has she been doing, my dear?” asked Mrs. Stewart, always just and wishing to be impartial.

“She has been flirting all the afternoon with the Marchese Mazzarelli, and now she has begun with Dr. St. Claire,” said Clarissa. “And it looks so dreadful in such a young girl as she is! She will not mind a word I say, though I try to check her when we are together. But I think she goes on worse than ever when I speak to her. So do you speak to her your-

self, mother. She must not be allowed to make herself so conspicuous!"

"I will, most certainly," said Mrs. Stewart severely; for, Ione apart, flirting was a thing of which she had a constitutional horror. And she felt quite as keenly as Clarissa the unfavourable impression given to the people among whom she lived, by the undue freedom, not to say worse, of certain of her younger compatriots. When it came to anything like indiscretion in her own family it was intolerable. To do her justice, she had been a model of carefulness in her up-bringing of the two girls; and she was essentially a pure and modest little woman for her own part.

"Go to her, Clarissa," she continued after a pause, during which she had watched Ione standing between the two young men, and had seen how, in confirmation of her daughter's report, she turned her face to St. Claire and her shoulder to Mazzarelli. "Tell her that I want her to join the Lancini girls; and if she will not, then send her to me."

The Lancini girls were strolling over the sands accompanied by their father and mother, and a couple of handsome young Italians to pay them homage and make the day pleasant; but there was no possibility of a look or a word passing among them of which the authorities would not approve. Under such surveillance Mrs. Stewart felt that Ione would be properly restricted.

"We shall have to do something with that poor girl soon!" she said to her husband after Clarissa had left, her displeasure, like love, growing with what it fed on. "That wretched blood of hers!" she added below her breath; and her husband wisely did not

hear. All that he chose to hear he answered by saying, in his slow lazy way:—

“Do not take things too seriously. Ione does not care a straw for Mazzarelli, and I am very sure that St. Claire does not care for her.”

“She would make him if she could, if only to take him from Clarissa,” said Mrs. Stewart hastily.

“She cannot take from Clarissa what does not belong to her,” returned the Captain with more caution than candour. “St. Claire is a nice young fellow enough, but I will undertake to say he has no matrimonial projects in his head.”

“I do not know about that,” said Mrs. Stewart demurely.

“If I thought so I should have to change my manners,” said her husband, bound by that queer unwritten law, in force among English fathers, to openly discourage the idea of potential sons-in-law even when secretly desired. And Mrs. Stewart, a little over-awed, let the conversation drop.

Clarissa went back to the trio and duly delivered her mother’s message.

“Nony,” she said, trying to speak naturally and not quite succeeding; “mother wants us to join the Lancini girls. We have left them alone too long, she says.”

“They do not want us,” answered Ione.

“Mother wishes it,” repeated Clarissa.

“Do you go then. Why should I? They are your friends, not mine. I do not care for them,” returned Ione.

“That is not the question. It is mother’s wish,” again said Clarissa. “So, come Nony. Tell her to

obey my mother, Marchese," she said in Italian to Mazzarelli, as if his wish would be her sister's law.

"La Signorina Ione does not need my poor word to do what is right," answered the young fellow, laughing.

"I do not wish to go," said Ione, setting her lips.

"Come, Dr. St. Claire, let *us* go at all events!" said Clarissa as her master-stroke; and with this she looked at the young doctor prettily, and made a few steps forward.

St. Claire looked at Ione, but her eyes were cast down on the sand, and her handsome face was as rigid as stone.

"Shall I carry your shells for you?" he said in his sweetest and most charming manner, touching the ends of the handkerchief which she carried, full of shells, by the four corners.

The faintest little smile stole over her face. It was not so much a smile as a tremulous kind of moral sunshine; but it expressed all, and conceded all.

"Thank you, yes; take them for me," she said; and without another word turned with him and went up to the Italian ladies.

Her obstinacy had passed with her jealousy. St. Claire had identified himself with her, and she obeyed, neither Mrs. Stewart, nor Clarissa, but him. As for the Marchese, she overlooked him as entirely as if he had not been in existence; and St. Claire thought that for a pair of lovers, as Clarissa had said they were, she was remarkably indifferent and he as remarkably cool. But he was more than ever convinced that his blue-eyed informant was wrong, and that Ione did not love Mazzarelli.



After this the day seemed to fade for more than one. A wind rose cold and strong, and the sun seemed to lose its power. The gods deserted the earth, and sea and sky, and wood and plain were once more tenantless of all that divine life, that glorious throng, which had possessed and peopled them in the early day. No one knew what had happened, but all felt that the spirit of the festa had died and that only the body was left; and no one was sorry when the order to put to the horses was given, and the drive homeward began.

During that drive Ione was silent and concentrated; Clarissa was a little cross and pleaded headache; St. Claire was very sorrowful, held by two pains—one for Monica, and the other for Ione; the Stewarts were uneasy; and the Lancinis, though always amiable and sweet, were tired. The only person apparently at ease was the Marchese Mazzarelli, and his briskness was artificial. He had read the little drama aright, and, though he knew that he could not marry Ione himself, and was not mad enough to be in love with her to no purpose, yet he did not like to see her open preference for another. He would willingly have flung this handsome young Englishman with the French name into the sea as an offering to the infernal gods to whom he belonged—he would willingly have made a quarrel with him if he could. As he could not, he was exasperatingly good-tempered and bright, and talked all the way home, to no one's response.

Once on their way back, Ione raised her eyes to St. Claire's face in that sudden, swift, bewildering way of hers which seemed as if it took the very breath away of those at whom she looked. That look op-

pressed and haunted him. He could not read it. It was the look of a dumb creature asking for something it could not designate; of a soul in pain unable to express its sorrow; of a spirit in bondage within whose liberty lay such plenitude of power, such infinity of glory, and in whose imprisonment was such deadly pain. He was so deeply grieved for her! She had suggested Monica to him when he first saw her standing by the fountain in the sunshine; and ever since she had been somehow associated with that beloved image in his mind. How could he do her good? How could he make her happy? Ah, how indeed! The past gives no light by which the future may be discerned. If the mirror of the prophet hang behind him it is obscured and veiled. And Armine's unhappy love for Monica Barrington at Oakhurst was no guide to tell him how best to ensure the well-being of Ione Stewart at Palermo.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

## PLAYING WITH FIRE.

ST. CLAIRE was a man who might be trusted to keep out of temptation—to keep out of it better than he could withstand it when in it. But he was not a man to arrange circumstances for himself. He had no firm grip on life nor things anyhow;—a man of sensitive soul and tender conscience seldom has. So long as he kept from doing wrong he was content; he did not always trouble himself to make sure that he was doing wisely. The strongest characteristic about him was his patience, the most tenacious his affections, the most active his pity. He had eliminated from the roll-call of his moral qualities all that part of human nature which is sometimes called the savage and sometimes the animal; and he had not left alive in his soul the root of one ferocious passion, the outgrowth of one form of tyrannous desire, nor the smallest germ of the ordinary man's high-handed selfishness. Perhaps he had eliminated more than ferocity and selfishness. Be that as it may, he was eminently the kind of thing that women love as approaching nearer to themselves; and the dream of some among them is a race of men like Armine St. Claire, unselfish, loving, domestic, gentle, unsceptical, and pure.

Pitiful as he was by nature, use had so far hardened him to the sight of the physical pain inseparable from

his profession, as to make his nerves steady and his skill more serviceable than his sympathies; but sorrow found him as soft as if he had been a woman, and the tragedy woven into the substance of Ione's life touched him profoundly. He mentally pictured all manner of helpful positions, and made up no end of schemes for her benefit, each one more unworkable than the other. He would have adopted her as his sister, if an unbelieving world would have accepted the relationship in its integrity, and neither have sneered on the one hand nor punished on the other. He thought of writing to Mrs. Barrington, begging her to ask her on a visit, when perhaps Edward Formby would be taken by her beauty, her grace, her charm, and end once for all his unsubstantial relations with Monica in the hard-and-fast fact of marriage with Ione. He tumbled out of the bag of his memory the names of all the lonely spinsters who would be so much happier if only they would adopt as a daughter a charming young creature with red-gold hair and amber-coloured eyes, given to fits of moody melancholy and to outbursts of violent jealousy. He worried himself into a couple of sleepless nights and an attack of fever on account of her; and Clarissa's clever revelation only drew him closer to the girl from whom it was sought to detach him. But he merely gave himself a headache, upset his digestion, shook his nerves, and made himself generally feeble, while he did no earthly good to Ione.

This desire to play Providence was as futile in his case as it has been in that of others; and he had to confess the sorrowful truth that each of us must dree his own weird as best may be, and that bearing one

another's burdens is as difficult in fact as it is problematical in issue.

Then he went to the Villa Clarissa; and, because he was pitiful and sympathetic, he threw a great deal of superfluous tenderness into his manner, and his handsome eyes looked far more love than he felt. For it was not love that he felt for Ione; it was only love's mimetic kinsman, pity.

Coincident with the strengthening of his interest in Ione, that of the Stewarts in himself declined. They were disappointed in him, they said one to the other. They had believed him to have been a young man of good principles and refined tastes; but they saw now that he did not possess the latter, and they were beginning to suspect the former. They would have been as hard put to it to explain why they thought this, as if they had looked for snipe in a stubble field. But the reason why has very little to do with feeling, and logic and emotion are the vinegar and oil which, do what you will, never coalesce. The Stewarts, however, were too just and kind-hearted to turn an actively cold shoulder to St. Claire. They turned only one that was passively tepid; and, for the former warm and hearty hand, gave five limp and flabby fingers. Still, it was as yet a change of spirit to be felt rather than one of programme to be read aloud as he ran along the way; and St. Claire, though sensitive, was unsuspicious, and constitutionally averse from finding flaws in others or causes of discomfort for himself.

Neither did he see, as any one else would have seen, that he was assigned to Ione—told off to her as her special property in the oddest way imaginable;

and that she was assumed to be the sole cause of his coming to the villa at all.

When he called, and she was not in the room, Mrs. Stewart would say to Clarissa, as soon as the first formal greetings were over:—

“Go and call Ione, my dear, and tell her that Dr. St. Claire is here.” Or she would say to St. Claire himself: “Ione will be here directly. She has only gone out of the room for a moment.”

Once when the girl had driven into Palermo with the Captain, Mrs. Stewart put on a mournfully sympathetic face, as she said: “I am so very sorry! Ione has gone into town with my husband. She could not have expected you to-day, else I am sure she would not have gone; and I am afraid you will find your visit very uninteresting with only myself and my daughter to amuse you.”

“No, do not say that, Mrs. Stewart,” answered St. Claire with genuine earnestness. “You know how pleased I am always to be here with you and Miss Stewart.”

On which the plump little pigeon took up the parable on her own account, and, with a flushed face that yet had no sweet softness in its colour, said, in a voice acrid for all its forced laughter: “Oh! how can you say that, Dr. St. Claire? I am sure not!”

“You are sure not?” he repeated with a little surprise; then he added with more gallantry: “And I am sure of just the contrary. An hour passed with you, Miss Stewart, and you” (turning to Mrs. Stewart), “makes my day a veritable festa.”

“Then what is it when Nony is at home?” cried Clarissa shrilly.

"When your father and sister are at home?—a festa of superlative quality — 'Est, Est, Est!'" he laughed.

"What a flatterer you are, Dr. St. Claire!" said Mrs. Stewart in her mildly peevish way.

"Is confessing the truth flattery?" he asked in his sweetest.

"No, but making out that every one is so very precious to you—and always the one with whom you are, the most precious—that is flattery," she returned.

St. Claire looked grave, and his countenance perceptibly fell.

"I am sorry you think so meanly of me as that," he said in a pained voice. "I was not aware that I was a flatterer, which to my mind is merely synonymous with being a hypocrite. I am only conscious of very strong affections for those who, like yourselves, touch my heart and inspire me with respect; and of as strong gratitude when people have been as kind to me as you have been."

"But you make no distinction!" she objected. "You are so desperately communistic in all your feelings. One person is just the same to you as another."

"Surely not!" he said with energy. "Here, in Palermo, no one is to me what you all are."

"And you mass us all in a lump together!" said Mrs. Stewart, as if stating a grievance. "You see no difference between us!"

"Oh yes, he does, mother," said Clarissa, coming to the rescue with her wise little air. "He likes Nony the best, don't you, Dr. St. Claire?"

"I like your sister very much indeed," he answered. "About liking her the best, I scarcely know what to

say. I like you all so much, there is not a best among you, because there is not a worst."

"Oh yes, there is," said Clarissa, positive and amiable; and St. Claire let the matter drop.

He was conscious of breakers ahead; and he had no fancy for amateur shipwrecks.

Soon after this Ione and Captain Stewart came in, and St. Claire, troubled and a little embarrassed by the conversation, which had been substantially a bill of indictment against him, met the girl with less than his usual pronounced sympathy and admiration—not so much to shield himself from blame as to protect her. Ione caught the change of tone as swiftly as a mirror catches the reflection of the figure that passes before it.

"They have been speaking ill of me; they have prejudiced him against me; he has been paying compliments to Clarissa, and he does not care to see me; he is a wretch, and I hate him; and I do not care whether he likes to see me or not. I do not care for any one or any thing—but I wish I could kill St. Claire!"

Put into words, these were the sensations rather than connected thoughts which possessed Ione like angry demons—burnt and stung like fiery serpents—as she stood at a little distance from St. Claire, motionless as if struck to stone, with a face that might have been the face of a dead Fate, save for the palpitating nostrils and the quivering of the downcast eyelids.

"Are you tired, Ione?" asked Mrs. Stewart, watching her, but not quite comprehending what she saw.

"No," said Ione with an effort.

"Then sit down," said Mrs. Stewart.



"I said I was not tired," said Ione disdainfully.

"Where have you been? whom have you seen in Palermo?" asked Clarissa in a chatty and amiable way.

"No one," Ione answered.

"Not the Marchese Mazzarelli?" was the girl's next question, made with sympathetic interest.

"I said no one," returned Ione.

"That was a pity," laughed Clarissa with meaning.

"Why?" asked Ione, suddenly raising her eyes flaming with scorn. "I did not go to see any one. I went to shop, as you know."

"Still, it would have made it pleasanter if you had seen some one," said Clarissa significantly.

"*You* might have thought so; *I* did not," was her answer.

But in truth she had hoped to have seen St. Claire, and she had been disappointed at not having met him. Yet now, when she had found him, how strange and unlike himself he was! It was more pain than pleasure to see him; and she wished he had left before she had arrived.

How unhappy and unfortunate she was! she thought to herself. Some subtle poison always infected what might else have been her happiness, and reduced it to nothing. It was as if she had been marked out for special persecution by a malignant fate, determined to punish and torment her. This new friend of theirs—how strange it seemed to think of him as new; she could scarcely imagine what her life had been without him!—but this friend, whose kindness and sympathy had flung as it were a rainbow into her leaden sky, now he was passing into the dead dulness of the

rest. He was becoming indifferent to her; withdrawing himself from her; turning from her to Clarissa. Was she never to have a friend of her very own? Was she always to be second to this girl, who, without giving her the love, usurped the privileges of an elder sister? How wretched she was!—and how hateful all men and women were!

She was startled out of her reverie of mingled jealousy and despair by Captain Stewart saying abruptly; "Now that you are here, St. Claire, let us have a game at billiards. There will be time enough. Come, Clarissa—come, Io. Are you asleep?" he added to this latter sharply.

"I do not want to play," said Ione sullenly.

"Nonsense! Stuff!" said the Captain. "Come."

"Don't be so selfish, Nony," said Clarissa. "We all want to play. Why should you spoil our pleasure for your own selfishness?"

"Do as you are told, Ione," said Mrs. Stewart.

"Why should I when I do not wish it?" asked Ione.

"It would be such a pity to spoil the game," said St. Claire in his soft voice and gentle way.

"The game would not be spoilt without me. Perhaps quite the contrary," she returned, still sullen, jealous, unpleasant. "Mamma, you can play," she said, turning to Mrs. Stewart.

"You know I take a cue only when there is no one else. I do not care for it," answered that lady rather crossly.

And indeed this was the truth. Standing for half an hour, with intervals of walking smartly round a table and leaning over the edge in uncomfortable

angles, to strike a ball which never by any chance went where she had aimed and always did unexpected things—caracoling to undesirable places and diving into pockets which seemed as if they had some special attraction for her balls in particular—all this was an amusement by no means to Mrs. Stewart's taste; and, as she said, she never played save when compelled by politeness and the laws of hospitality to make the fourth in a game which else could not be made without her.

"Oh, Nony, how tiresome you are! What a fuss you always make over every little thing!" said Clarissa with a weary air, not to be wondered at considering the provocation. For indeed Ione was essentially tiresome when these fits of jealousy were on her.

Raising her eyes to look at her sister and slaughter her by their "dynamic glance," Ione caught St. Claire's by the way. He made the faintest little sign with his head, meaning "yield," and "come"; and with this sign he smiled as if sure that she would pleasure him by her obedience. This was the second time that he had undertaken the direction of her actions and the softening of her temper; and the second time that he had not miscalculated his power.

Her face changed from its present sullenness as quickly as it had changed from its radiance of delight at seeing him to the gloom of disappointment and the hardness of resentment at his comparative coldness. The strain and tension of her lips relaxed; the angry light died out of her eyes; the dead whiteness of her cheeks and lips became less opaque, less livid, and more as if the blood had left her heart, where it had all gathered, to flow once more naturally and easily

through her veins. Then in the most gracious, the sweetest way possible, she turned to Mrs. Stewart, and said, as amiably as if she had been Clarissa herself:—

“Poor mamma, I am sure I do not wish to annoy you. Of course I will play if you desire it.”

Her sudden outburst of unwonted amiability startled her family as if it had been a cry. The two women, and even the Captain—who naturally, as only a dense-witted man, had not the keener flair of these others—saw the motive and understood the reason why; while St. Claire thought, as he had thought more than once before: “She is perfectly tractable if taken the right way. It is they who do not understand her, not she who is unmanageable.”

And thinking this, he “peacocked himself” not a little on the deftness of his manipulation and the cleverness of his good generalship.

After this little scene the Stewarts gave up the young doctor more and more to Ione, and took ever less part in him themselves. This was not done as if they threw Ione at his head, or wished to make up serious relations between them. It was done in a half-disdainful, half-uncomfortable way, as if they had said: “As this is your bad taste, take it and make the best of it you can. We hold ourselves superior to you and her and the whole sorry play going on before our eyes. We countenance your special interest in this undesirable girl—if you have any special interest, and it is not all a show or sham—but we wash our hands of you; and do not care what becomes of you.”

And indeed this was the mental attitude of all three; for Clarissa, reasonable after the event and submissive to destiny according to the way of the

lymphatic and amiable, had accepted her position as second to Ione with equanimity when once she had shed out all her tender feeling for St. Claire in one copious outburst of disappointed tears. Her normal dislike to her adopted sister had not greatly increased; and her tepid contempt for the young Englishman's bad taste was perhaps but natural to a pretty girl who sees herself distanced by one not held to be her equal in good looks, social position, or moral conduct, in home attractions or matrimonial desirability. At all events there was no bitterness, no poison, in her feelings towards the two; and so far her philosophy was to her credit.

It was Mrs. Stewart rather than Clarissa who resented with bitterness the way in which things had gone; and if she did not make things so actively unpleasant for St. Claire that he could not visit at the house at all, it was only because she saw a chance of getting Ione well settled and off her hands for life; and between maternal jealousy and the prospect of relief, she cherished the latter rather than the former as the more paying investment of time and feeling.

As for Captain Stewart, he simply dropped his young countryman and handed him over to the women, as a poor creature not worth powder and shot. He was disappointed in him, he said; but he said no more; and his wife knew him too well to press on his reserve. There are things not to be dissected even between husband and wife; and this was one of them.

It was decidedly an uncomfortable position for St. Claire. These unexpressed displeasures and silent disappointments always are. But his sweetness of temper, his patience, the purity of his motives, together

with his sincere gratitude for past kindnesses—in spite of that look and air of a disguised prince which made him appear to accept all homage as his due—carried him safely, and in some sense easily, through the ordeal; enabling him to take the rough with the smooth as of the appointed order of things. And as, fortified in his own heart by his inextinguishable passion for Monica, he was very far from intending to make love to Ione, he had no scruple in showing her attentions which, as has been said, were the offspring of compassion for her unhappy history, a desire to smooth away some of the worst angles of her uncongenial position, and a purely æsthetic kind of admiration for her beauty and originality.

“I wish I could do something to make you happy,” he said one day, as they were walking about the garden—the chief pleasure at Villa Clarissa—well in view but out of hearing of Mrs. Stewart and her daughter, who were at some little distance behind them.

“Thank you,” said Ione, finding her words marvelously difficult of utterance.

It was strange how her voice all but failed her when she was alone with St. Claire, and how unpleasant it was to her to hear its tones so deepened and roughened when they did come; how still more unpleasant to be obliged to take long breaths before she could speak at all. She had never before experienced these sensations, and she was somewhat humiliated in her own mind to know that there lived any one in the world who could thus throw her off her balance and make her less than the absolute mistress of herself she always was when with others.

"Your life here is evidently uncongenial to you," continued St. Claire, looking at her full of rash pity.

"Yes," she said.

"And you cannot change it?"

"How can I?" was her answer, made with that kind of patience which sounds so like disdain. "I cannot live on nothing; and they will not allow me to do anything which might support me."

"But indeed what could you do?" he said, so far on their side.

"A thousand things," she answered. "I could do what other girls do who have to get their own living—why not?"

"You are not fit to go into the world alone," said St. Claire, thinking of her beauty.

"Why not?" she asked quickly, raising her eyes to his.

At this moment she was no longer embarrassed, no longer subdued and softened. St. Claire's opposition to her cherished dream, his acceptance of that which she considered a wrong done to her and caressed as her standing grievance, chased away her gentler mood; and she was once more herself, stiffened to oppose and armed to resent.

"You are too lovely," said St. Claire.

Her heart leapt with pleasure.

"I am not," she said, with that false modesty which asks for further assurance—which craves reiteration of that dear praise.

"You are the most beautiful girl I have ever known," said St. Claire.

An indescribable expression came into Ione's face. It was not the soft submission of a loving woman,

whose love is her honour and her lover her king—not the patient tenderness of a meek maiden accepting with gratitude and prepared to bestow without demanding—but it was the look of a queen who receives with superb satisfaction the homage which yet she claims as her right. St. Claire's praises intoxicated her; but for all that they were her right.

"You are very good to say so," she returned, in a lowered voice. "But you forget Clarissa," she added, in an altered tone.

"She is not equal to you, pretty as she is," said St. Claire ingenuously.

"Do you think her so very pretty?" she asked jealously.

"Very. She is charming for her type," he answered. "But her type is not equal to yours," he went on to say, looking at his companion, as he had looked at her before, with eyes full of admiration.

"Would you tell her so if she asked you?" said Ione, with an unpleasant smile.

"Well, it would be difficult to tell her that," he replied, also with a smile; but his was frank, and just a little playful, as if he were putting by the folly of a child.

"Then you would say the same things to her that you have been saying to me?" she asked, looking sideways through her narrowed lids.

"No, I should not," was his reply. "I could not, for I do not think it. It would not be true."

"Truth has very little to do with the matter," said Ione. "Every one tells stories."

"Not every one," he said gravely.

"Not you, when you flatter?"



"I do not flatter," he replied.

"You have been flattering me just now," said Ione, with a little laugh, not wholly pleasant nor wholly unamiable.

"No, I have only told the truth," he said.

And then she looked at him with one of those sudden and wonderful looks which seemed to envelope him as if in a garment of fire—to dazzle his sight and take away his breath, and confuse his brain so that he could not think distinctly nor reason clearly.

"What strange power have you?" he said, after a moment's pause. "Your eyes are worlds in themselves!"

"Are they?" she answered. "Not very pleasant worlds, I fear!"

"Worlds where one gets lost—unfathomable, inexplicable."

"Oh! the key is not very difficult," said Ione, with affected indifference.

"I wish I had it," he replied.

"Perhaps you have, if you cared to use it," she said.

"I would use it if I knew I had it. I should like to understand you," he returned.

"I am easily read."

"By what light?"

She hesitated; her eyes wandered a little aimlessly over the ground where they were cast. She could not say what she thought: "By the light of love—the light of homage—the light of confessing my supremacy and submitting to my domination;" but after a time she drew her thoughts together under a more befitting veil, and answered: "By the light of common sense and a little sympathy."

"I hope I have the former—I know I have the latter," said St. Claire. "Yet I do not understand you."

"I thought you did," she answered, with a changed face.

"Not your eyes when you look like that," he said.

"Then you have less sympathy than you think you have," she answered, with somewhat harsh frankness. "There is nothing about me or my eyes so very inexplicable if you cared to understand."

"But I do," he said. "I do wish both to understand and help you."

She turned to him with the sweetest graciousness.

"The very wish helps me," she said softly. "My life is so lonely that any words of sympathy are pleasant."

"You have all mine," was his reply, made just as the two ladies, cutting across the garden, came face to face upon them at the angle where the lavender-walk intersected the rose-border.

All his what? Both mother and daughter heard the words, and discussed them between themselves with some anxiety and more curiosity. All his love?—all his hope?—what did he mean? What had they been saying to each other? It was of no use to ask Ione, and they could not question him; but things seemed to be coming to a crisis somehow; and perhaps the hope, now that Clarissa had thrown him over, of St. Claire's freeing them of Ione, was nearing fulfilment. Meanwhile Ione herself pondered on his words, his looks, his manner, the tones of his voice, the very movement of his hands. And the result of all was that vague kind of hope, rather than confessed

belief, of a woman who has not yet heard the beloved speak of love—that atmosphere of dumb passion which means: “He loves me, and he will one day tell me so.”

It was playing with fire in truth. And the end of it all? Her destruction, or his own? and the bonds which bound him to sweet, dreamy Monica burnt like tow in the flame?

END OF VOL. I.

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